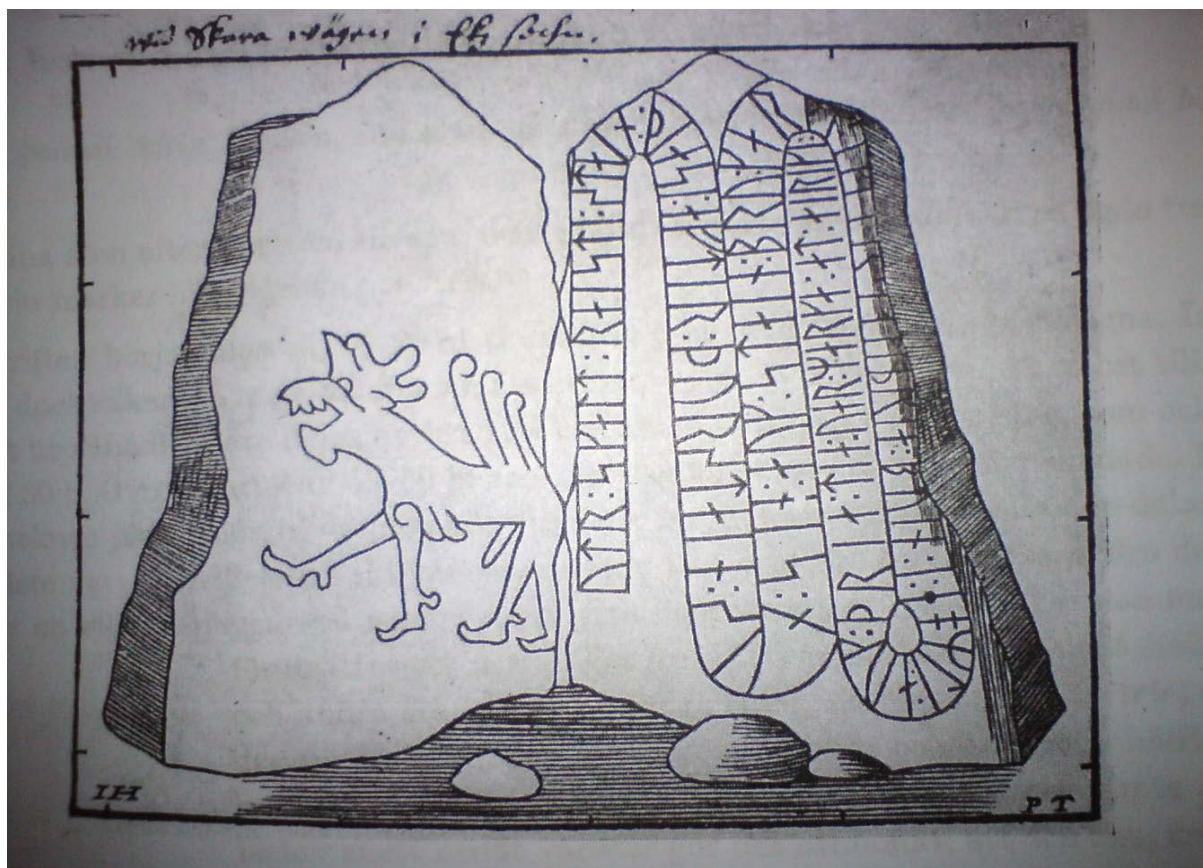


Rune Stones and Magnate Farms: The Viking Age in Vadsbo Hundred.



Magister's Essay in Archaeology

Stockholm University

Spring Term 2011

Gregory Hayden Tanner

Supervisor: Dr. Anders Carlsson

Table of Contents

1. Opening

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Aim

1.3 Questions

2. Vadsbo Hundred

2.1 Geographic information

2.2 A history of the Hundred

3. Odins home?

3.1 Background on Odin and Odin cults during the Viking Age

3.2 Place names referring to Odin in the area

3.3 Ranes stenar: Odin's hall?

4. Archaeological features of Vadsbo Hundred

4.1 The rune stones of the Hundred and their locations

4.2 The burial mounds of the Hundred and their locations

4.3 The surface finds of the Hundred and their locations

4.4 The early churches of the Hundred and their locations

4.5 The magnate farms of the Hundred and their locations

5. Conclusions

6. Summary

7. References

Abstract: This paper deals with the Viking Age society of Vadsbo Hundred, Västergötland County, Sweden with a special focus area surrounding Lake Östen. I have attempted to understand the relationships between the many Odin references in the names of many natural features, Viking Age farms and settlements within the area. A possible link to an Odin cult being in operation during the period and how that effected the settlements and activities surrounding Lake Östen was also investigated due to the high number of Odin related names, places, and monuments within the area.

1. Opening

1.1 Introduction

The paper deals with the Viking Age population of Vadsbo Hundred, located in present day Västergötland County, in western Sweden. I have undertaken an effort to document all of the place-name references to Odin regarding both natural features, and Viking farms, settlements and monuments. This was done in order to help establish the theory that there was an Odin cult in place in the area during the Viking Age which had a strong influence on the local population as well as the settlement patterns within the area. It is possible that Vadsbo Hundred was seen as the home of Odin and the site of Valhalla in Asgård for the Viking Age people in this area.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this paper is to understand the importance of and relationship between the numerous Odin references in the names of local natural features, and Viking Age farms and settlements within the area of Vadsbo Hundred, particularly around Lake Östen. Local contemporary as well as medieval place names will be studied in relation to one another as well as a comparison of all of the various Rune stones, burial mounds, surface finds and other ancient monuments related to the period in an attempt to understand the Viking Age inhabitants of Vadsbo Hundred, the locations of their magnate farms and their possible cult activities related to Odin's home and Valhalla.

1.3 Questions

What is the relationship between the Viking Age magnate farms and local place names? What of the numerous Rune stones, burial mounds, surface finds, and ancient monuments? Are they also tied to subsequent names? Can they help us place farms and other sites?

What is the relationship between the numerous natural geographical features in the landscape bearing references to Odin? Was the area surrounding Lake Östen (Odens sjö) thought of as a home or sacred place of Odin? Was there local elite in place influencing this possible cult belief? Is Ranens stenar a representation of Odin's hall in Asgård?

2. Vadsbo Hundred

2.1 Geographic Information

Vadsbo Hundred lies in the northeast section of Västergötland County in western Sweden. The Hundred lies in-between the two large inland lakes, Vänern, to the West, and Vättern, to the east. The Hundred is bordered in the northwest by Värmland County, and in the northeast by Närke County. To the south of Vadsbo lie the Hundreds of Kinne, Valle, and Kåkind. In present times, largest town in the hundred is Mariestad, with around 15,000 inhabitants (Svärdström 1958, p. 1).



Fig. 1 Vadsbo Hundred, Västergötland County, Sweden. The Hundred is shaded in grey in the northeast section of the county. (Wikipedia Commons, 2011.)

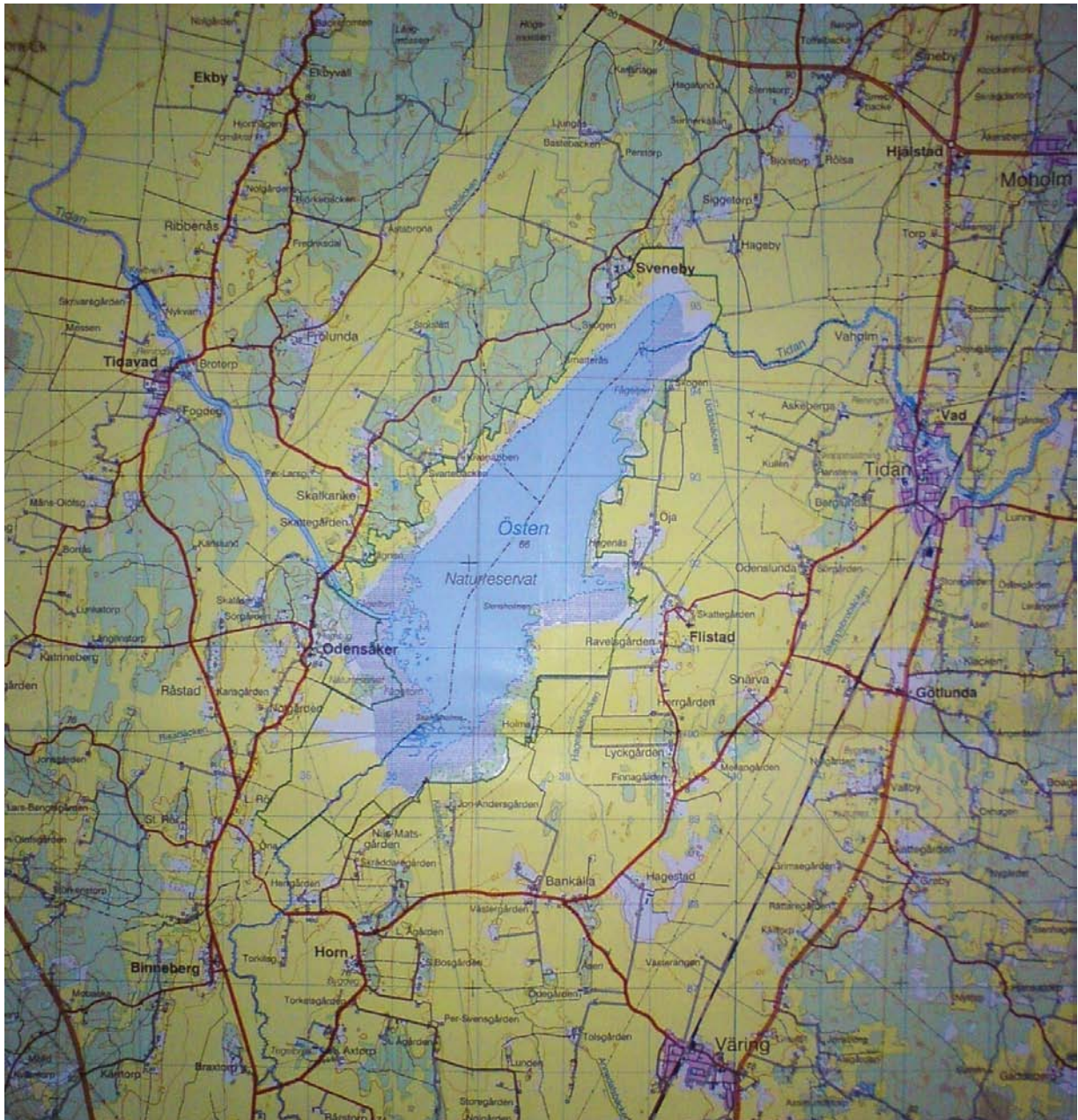


Fig. 2 The area surrounding Lake Östen, Vadsbo Hundred. Note lake size difference due to modern drainage area. (Lantmäteriet, Terrängkarta 577, 2008.)

The river Tidan runs through Vadsbo Hundred from east to west connecting Vänern to Vättern, slowing at one point to form the lake Östen(somewhat drained in modern times), which is the focal point of the Viking Age activities this paper addresses. The area surrounding Lake Östen is filled with fields and good farm land, with areas of pine and deciduous forest. This landscape has evidently not changed in any large degree from the late Iron Age as evidenced by many contemporary farm and field names dating back to the period.

The elevation of the Hundred in the area of Lake Östen varies from 70 to 90 meters above sea level, with a generally flat landscape productive for farming and with relatively few hills. Most forest has been cleared for farming with the exception of the rises and forested land on the western side of Lake Östen (Lantmäteriet 2008).

2.2 A History of the Hundred

According to historical records, the division of the Hundred of Vadsbo was first made official in the Äldre Västgötalagen or “Elder Västgöta laws” written in 1220 A.D. At the time, the landscape of what is now the area of Västergötland County was divided into 32 Hundreds, with Vadsbo being the largest. The idea of dividing the kingdom into Hundreds likely came to Sweden by way of Denmark during the medieval period as part of the shifting ideas and new power structures tied to the Christianization of Scandinavia. It is also believed that the system of Hundreds was a continuation of previous political and royal administrative organizations already established during the earlier Viking period (Billing 1983, p. 8). A possible scenario: The Magnate farm already established at Vadsbo, with control over the area of Lake Östen during the Viking period was reorganized according to a medieval Christian pattern and enlarged into the Hundred of Vadsbo during the middle ages.

The naming of Vadsbo Hundred, and its meaning are somewhat debated, however it is generally accepted that the name Vadsbo is even older than the oldest records of the name dating back to the early 13th century. Its meaning has been interpreted as “Vads bo” or “Vad’s magnate farm” referring to an older royal estate probably dating back to at least the Viking Period that was located at what is now the modern village of Vad, approximately 3 kilometers east of Lake Östen on the shores of the river Tidån (Brink 1996, p. 259).

The first part of the name, Vad, comes from the term “att vada” which in Swedish means to cross over a river without a bridge. The modern village of Vad is placed along the shores of the river Tidån, so it seems that the cause for the naming of the place would be that people simply transferred the name of the village, or previous magnate farm from the spot where people historically crossed the river.

The bo institution itself in Västergötland is unique in Sweden, whereas the various “boar” are designative of individual administrative districts. The names of these districts are obviously named after various royal estates. It is also interesting to point out that according to Brink “all the names compounded with –bo –bu outside of Västergötland, the second element has rather the semantic context of ‘settlement district’, not the ‘administrative district’” seen exclusively in the County (Brink 1996, p. 259).

3. Odin’s home?

3.1 Background on Odin and Odin Cults during the Viking Age

The pantheon of Norse mythology is filled with divers Gods, semi-Gods, giants, and creatures imbued with mystical powers. Entire worlds, such as Utgård, Midgård, and Asgård, home of the Gods with its mystical magical tree, Yggdrasill, which was the center of the universe, are the places in which the stories and histories of the Gods unfurl. At the head of this mystical universe was Odin, “The Father of all” and “Father of the slaughtered”. These two names reflect his position not only as the head of the Norse Pantheon, but also his dual role as the God of war and the dead. It is important, however, to note that early on in the mythology Odin is not the chief of all the Gods, rather one tribe of them, the Aesir. The other tribe, the Vanir are often at odds with the Aesir in the early tales (O’Donoghue 2007, p. 24).

The home or ruling place of Odin in Asgård was Valhalla, the hall of the warrior-dead. It is described as being a magnificent hall with many doors, with spear shafts as rafters and roofed with golden shields. All of the Viking warriors which had fallen in battle throughout history were believed to be gathered, feasting and battling in Valhalla, with Odin himself seated at the head of the table, until Ragnarok, a sort of mythological Apocalypse resulting in the death of even Odin himself. The hall was said to have been able to cater to all these warriors due to the fact that everyone in attendance feasted upon the meat of a mystical boar called Saehrimnir which magically reconstituted itself every evening (O’Donoghue 2007, p. 71). Odin’s steed Sleipnir, which he rode from Valhalla to Hel, the realm of the dead for those other than warriors, amongst other places, had eight legs and was said to be the finest of all horses ever created (Näsström 2001, p. 57).

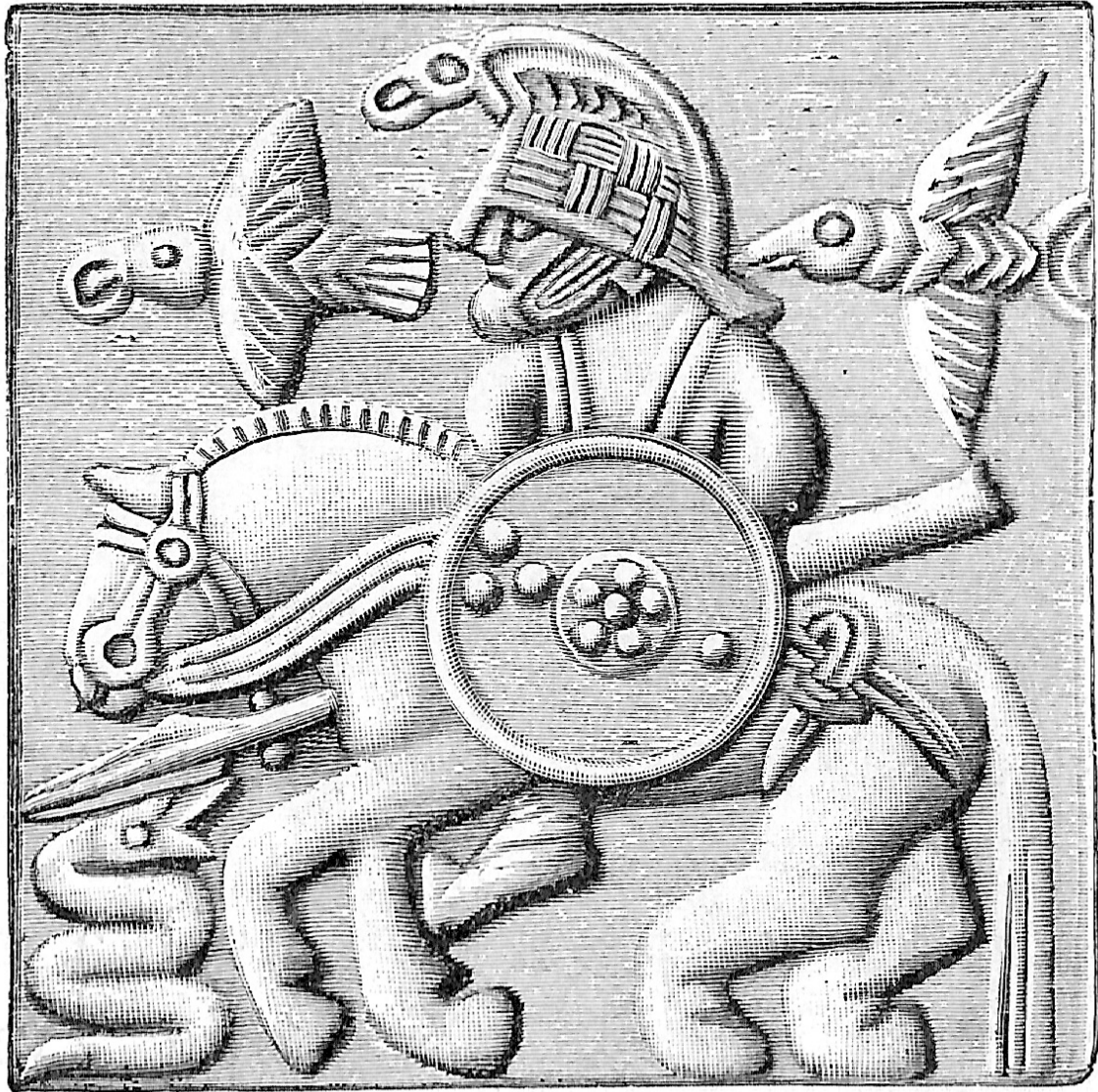


Fig. 3 Odin with Hugin and Munin. Early portrayal from a Vendel period helmet. (Wikipedia Commons, 2011.)

It was believed that the fallen warriors in Odin's hall did not drink water; rather they drank an everlasting supply of mead supplied by another mystical animal, this time being supplied from the udder of a goat called Heidrun. Odin himself did not drink the mead or eat the meat of Heidrun and Saehrimnir, rather he was said to have received all the sustenance he needed from wine. The food on his plate was given to his two pet wolves, Geri and Freki. Odin also had a wife, the Goddess Frigg, and two ravens perched on his shoulders called Hugin and Munin who flew out every morning to gather news and information about the goings-on in the world and report back to him every evening in Valhalla (O'Donoghue 2007, p. 71).

Food and drink in Valhalla was served by beings called Valkyries, in the service of Odin. Valkyrie means “chooser of the slain” in Old Norse and they were often portrayed as Handmaidens bearing horns filled with mead to fallen warriors, or even occasionally as warriors on the battlefield in their own right, battling on horseback and claiming the heroes of the dead to take to Valhalla (O’Donoghue 2007, p. 71). Clearly there was a belief in the Viking World of a resting place until Ragnarok for aristocratic warrior elite in Valhalla with Odin which was honorable, and not to be feared, rather sought after in life.

But what of the actual worship of Odin by Viking Age peoples? What sorts of Cult activities took place surrounding the belief in Odin and the ultimate goal of feasting and fighting alongside him in Valhalla till Ragnarok? To begin with, it is important to recognize Odin’s position within Viking Age society as the literal God of war and death. For the Vikings, the line between saga and reality was often blurred. Odin, Thor and Frey were real entities with magical powers that could visit the world of man and effect outcomes in daily life. I see it as a similar way of thinking as many modern followers of faiths believing and praying to a literal God and Jesus Christ with supernatural powers that are spoken of in stories found in The Bible.

Most of what we now know of Odin, his exploits in the spirit and human worlds, and manners of worship pertaining to him come from the numerous *sagor* compiled by the Icelandic bard Snorri Sturleson in the early thirteenth century (Näsström 2001, p. 16). In one case, he describes the tradition of making a sacrificial offering of food or blood and consecrating it before drinking mead from a special drinking vessel around the hearth of the Cult hall in Trondheim. Cheers were then drunk in honor of Njord and Frey for a good harvest. Then a separate drink was done in honor of Odin “for victory in battle and our King’s kingdom” (Nordberg 2003, p. 122).

The concept that Odin was believed to give victory in battle was also familiar to Adam of Bremen, a German bishop and chronicler of the Christianizing of the Scandinavian countries in the 11th century. In his book “IV” he described that three statues of the Gods Thor, Frey and Odin stood at the center of the great hall in Uppsala (Nordberg 2003, p. 122).

At Uppsala, offerings were made to Thor for the relief of sickness or famine, whereas believers turned to Frey in matters of love and marriage. According to Adam, it was Odin who was the personification of rage. It was he who dictated the outcomes of war and gave mankind the power and ability to fight. Thus, it was for these reasons that offerings and sacrifices were placed before the statue of him in matters of war (Nordberg 2003, p. 122).

Adam also describes that the statue of Odin was completely clad in armor. This would seem accurate, and in line with other descriptions of Odin from other contemporary sources such as Snorri Sturlesson's account of the Gods final battle in Ragnarok where Odin is described as "Riding foremost with a helm of gold, a shirt of fine chainmail, and his spear Gungnir" (Nordberg 2003, p. 122).

If one is to interpret Sturlesson's works and try to understand the role of Odin in the pantheon, it becomes quite evident that he meant that all people that died in combat came to Odin in Valhalla, whereas all others went to Hel, the realm of the dead for non-warriors. However, it is not quite that simple, for in other contemporary tales there are individuals who die in combat who do not get exalted to Odin in Valhalla and others who did not die in combat who occasionally do (Nordberg 2003, p. 125). In my opinion, it is however possible to see that Odin worship in its hall-based form was a cult activity clearly tied with social elites and magnate farms, and the men at their command who believed themselves due a rightful place at Odin's table in Valhalla; this end being achieved after regular sacrifices and offerings to Him and the other Gods during their mortal lives, and a crowning, glorious death in battle.

But what of the non-elites in the Viking world? What of the common farmers and craftsmen working under the influence of the social elites and kings in their halls? What of those who are usually left out of the historical record; the vast majority of the population of the late Iron Age if you will? How did they perceive and worship Odin? It is difficult to know with any certainty exact details of their practices, however we know from the archaeological record, in the form of ancient monuments and also place names that have survived into modern times that certain areas and features were seemingly tied to Odin cult activities. Details of the archaeological finds and places within Vadsbo Hundred tied to Odin will be addressed in later chapters.

3.2 Place names referring to Odin in the area

The area of Vadsbo Hundred, particularly the area surrounding Lake Östen, which is the focus area of this paper, is filled with several places, both natural, and man-made bearing names referring to Odin. Sometimes the references are obvious, such as Odensåker, or Odenslund. Others have required taking a closer look, with background knowledge of local and historical names for the God of war, and also historical name changes and name variations of certain features, places and monuments. I have studied historical maps and records from the area. This has taken considerable more time than simply picking up a current topographical map of the area and circling all the “Odens”.

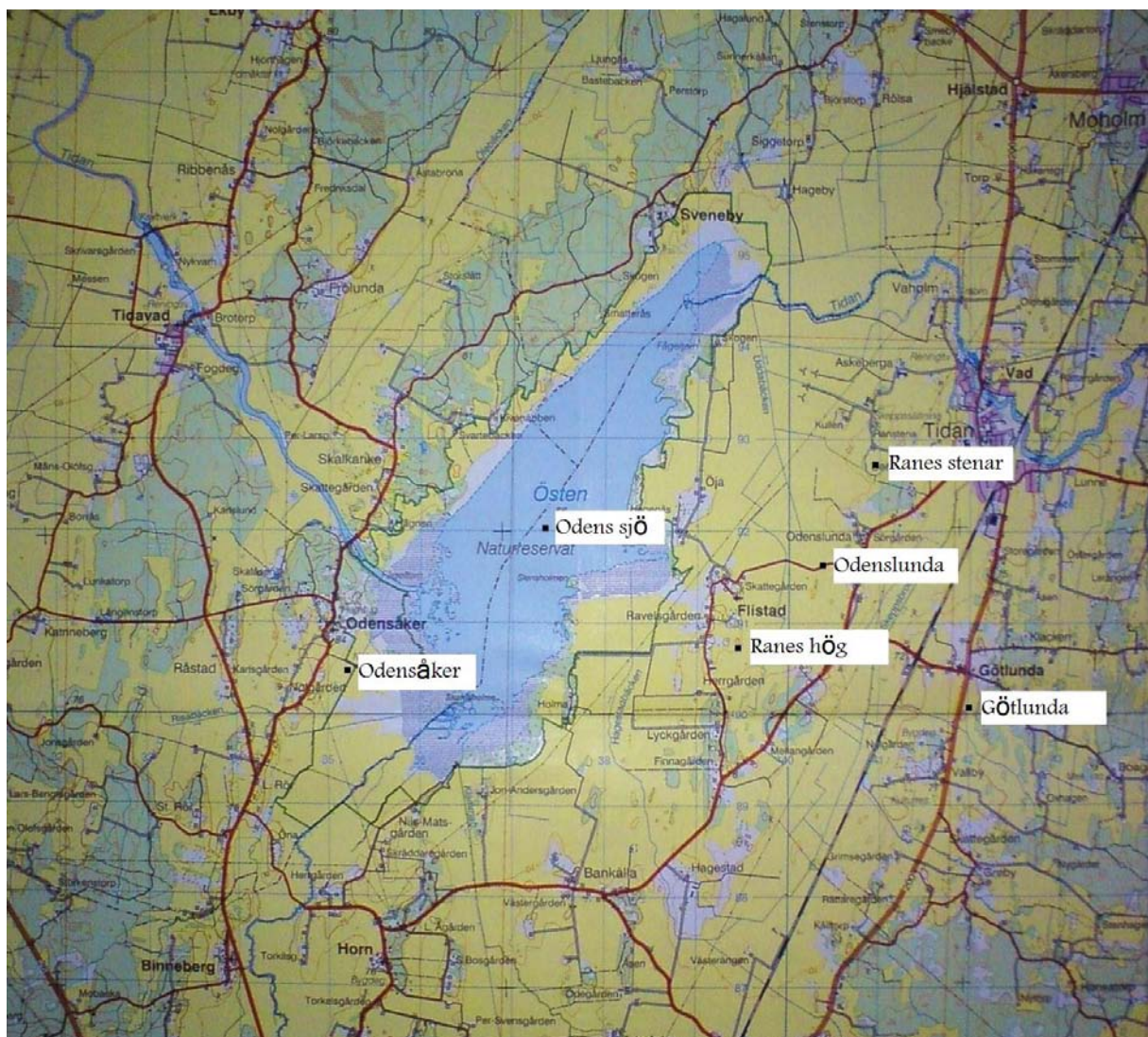


Fig. 4 Odin name-references within area of Lake Östen. Points mark approximate locations. (Lantmäteriet, Terrängkarta 577, 2008.)

To begin the task of locating possible Odin cult related sites, I have created a map of the area which has all of the places with Odin references clearly marked, both natural and man-made. A full list of the individual sites with some information behind their naming and purpose has also been compiled. Several of the sites will also be referred to in greater detail in subsequent chapters due to their importance in establishing evidence of Odin cult activities in the area:

Site: Odensåker

Original/Alternate names: Odensåker

Background: A cult site dedicated to the worship of Odin located immediately to the west of Odin's Lake. Its name has been interpreted as Odin's sacred field, or offering place. Of note, and strengthening this interpretation is another "åker" in Västergötland County, Friggeråker, near the town of Falköping, a cult place dedicated to Odin's wife Frigg (Linde 1982, p. 9).

Site: Odens sjö

Original/Alternate names: Odenssjö, Odens sjö, Östen

Background: An inland lake within Vadsbo Hundred fed by the Tidan River. The name Östen is a newer naming of the lake that has been interpreted as referring to its tendency to "Ösa", or flow in heavily and flood from time to time. In older sources the lake is often referred to as "Odens sjö" or Odin's Lake, a name with obvious cult ties (Linde 1982, p. 8).

Site: Odenslunda

Original/Alternate names: Odenslunda

Background: Located on the opposite side of Odens sjö to Odensåker, in-between Ranesténar to the north, and Raneshög to the south, Odenslunda has also been tied to the seemingly strong presence of an Odin cult in the area. Odenslunda has been interpreted as referring to a sacred grove dedicated to offerings to Odin (Linde 1982, p. 25).

Site: Ranes hög

Original/Alternate names: Flistads hög, Kung Ranes hög, Ranes hög

Background: A burial mound over 6 meters in height, and over 20 meters in diameter, dating to the late Iron Age. Located next to the church of Flistad, Ranes hög has traditionally been locally believed as belonging to a mystical king “Rane” who held court at near-by Askeberga, the site of Ranes stenar (Linde 1982, p. 55). Whereas there was likely a royal farm in the area around the modern village of Vad, and several other farms associated with it, it is more likely that the name Rane refers to the God Odin, rather than a specific king, as no references to a “Rane” appear on any rune stones or other historical records from the area. Rane is probably best known as a God of the sea, yet another name for Odin in Västergötland, and other places in Sweden during the Viking period was Rane (Lindblom 1982, p. 21). Considering the heavy concentration and use of Odin names and variables of Odin names in the area (Oden, Göt, Rane) I believe this to be a likely and logical connection.

Site: Ranes stenar

Original/Alternate names: Askeberga, Ranes stenar, Ranstena

Background: Traditionally, yet probably mistakenly called a stone ship setting, Ranes stenar at Askeberga are rather most likely a stone monument representing Odin’s hall in Asgård, Valhalla (Råsled 2005, p. 5). The reasons for this are numerous, and will be focused on in the following chapter. The name Rane can be seen tied to this monument which points to likely Odin cult associations, and even a possible tie with the near-by Ranes hög.

Site: Götlunda

Original/Alternate names: Götlunda

Background: The eastern-most site in my group study, Götlunda, also interpreted as a sacred grove or offering place, is also believed to be tied to Odin cult activities, and again shows the strong presence, density and focus of Odin place-names in the area immediately surrounding Odens sjö. Göt was another name for Odin in Västergötland County, as well as other parts of Sweden during the period (Linde 1982, p. 31).

Upon studying the map of the different sites referring to Odin in the focus area of Vadsbo Hundred surrounding Lake Östen, or Odens sjö, as it will hereafter be referred to as in this paper, and reading the different interpretations of the meanings of those references it would appear as if one thing becomes evident: There was definitely some form of focus being placed upon the remembrance, honoring and/or worship of the God Odin taking place in the area during the Viking Age.

This cult activity was likely an organized effort with roots set in the form of local elites in charge, practicing the hall form of Odin worship; even going to the lengths of erecting an enormous, full-scale stone representation of Odin's own hall in Asgård, Valhalla, to show their dedication and practice their faith. Even others seem to also be using sacred farms, fields and groves to worship and possibly make offerings to the God of war and death.

3.3 Ranes stenar: Odin's hall?

The modern site of Askeberga in Vadsbo Hundred, located approximately one kilometer to the east of Odens sjö is home to the remarkable stone monument known as Ranes stenar, or Odin's Stones. The monument consists of 24 stone blocks in the form of a Viking great hall, some of which weighing up to 30 tons each. It is 55 meters long and 18 meters wide, and its construction must have taken considerable effort, organization and man-power (Lindblom 1982, p. 20).

In many contemporary sources and on current maps Ranes stenar is somewhat frustratingly often miss-referred to as a stone ship monument. There are several problems with this interpretation: To begin with, and I think the most obvious are the open ends on both ends of the hall. In all stone ship monuments, there is a prow, and stern stone, one usually being taller or larger than the other to indicate which way the ship is "sailing". These are both missing at Ranes stenar (Råsled 2005, p. 1.).



Fig. 5 Ranestenen. (Fotevikensmuseum.se, Ranestenen, 2011.)

Also of interest to Ranestenen, and possibly strengthening the Valhalla/Odin cult theory is the fact there is only one other similar stone monument to it in all of Scandinavia, and it just happens to lie in Nässjö, five kilometers southwest of the town of Vadstena, directly to the east of Vadsbo Hundred on the eastern shore of Lake Vättern in Östergötland County.

Although slightly smaller in scale at 44 meters long and 17 meters wide this “hall” is also quite impressive and consists of the same pattern of 24 stones (Råsled 2005, p.1). Were the two related and part of the same cult-ideology? It is in my opinion a compelling possibility.

When considering the phenomenon of the two enigmatic hall monuments, seemingly without parallel in all the rest of the Viking world, in his paper which focused on Ranestenen, Bengt Råsled came up with a very interesting theory related to one of the most obvious relationships between the two structures: He focused on what was unique about the structures, and also what separates them from stone ships besides the open endings at either end of the monuments, specifically, the 24 stones used in each hall.

Råsled's theory on the number of stones themselves and not just a similarity in their placement and form to Valhalla, which I also find very interesting and possibly strengthening as to the idea of a cult purpose being the underlying factor for the construction of the two hall monuments was thus: There are 24 stones in both of the monuments. There are 24 runes in the Elder runic alphabet. Ranes stenar is believed to have been constructed during the Iron Age so this could also seem to support a conscious connection to the earliest runic alphabet (Råsled 2005, p. 9).

Also of note in terms of an Odin cult connection is the fact that during the Viking Age it was believed that Odin himself was the creator and keeper of the runes and their magic, and the runes themselves were the key he could use to make words and make mankind speak, write, read and obey. The runes were to be feared and respected. He who kept and could write the runes also had the power of them (Råsled 2005, p.9).

Upon my own study of Ranes stenar, and an examination of Bengt Råsleds study it is my opinion that Ranes stenar has in fact been misinterpreted and mislabeled by many as a stone ship monument. The obvious differences in form, possible connections to Odin cult activities of the hall type, as well as the existence of a second, very similar construction in near-by Östergötland all point to a different purpose altogether behind the construction of these monuments as opposed to the construction of stone ship monuments during the same period. Add to this that the two closely related monuments are the only two of their kind known to exist within the Viking world and one can in my eyes see a fairly compelling argument indeed.

4. Archaeological features of Vadsbo Hundred

4.1 The rune stones of the hundred and their locations

In order to gain a better understanding of the Vikings living in Vadsbo Hundred during the Viking Age I decided it would be beneficial to study and document all of the known rune stones in the area. A great deal of information can be gained from studying rune stones in any given area, besides any such immediately obvious information received from "simply reading the runes".

This other information can come from studying the runes providing the information on the stones themselves. First off, there were two main runic alphabets that were in use in Scandinavia prior to the adoption of the Latin alphabet: the first or Elder *futhark* (Norse alphabet) consisting of 24 characters, was developed and in use sometime just prior to or around the beginning of the Christian era and common to all of the Old Norse speaking peoples for the first six or seven hundred years after the birth of Christ. Next came the Younger futhark of the Viking Age proper, in use from circa 800-1050 A.D. This was a simplified version of the Elder futhark, consisting of 16 characters. There are also several regional variations and sub-types of the futhark which can help in establishing relative age within the period, location, and affiliation of those members of society and their farms and other possessions occasionally named in the inscriptions (Jones 1984 p. 419).

There are two types of runes known to be found in evidence within Vadsbo Hundred (Wideen 1955 p. 99). The vast majority of runes are written in the Younger futhark, but there is even one example of the Elder, found at the site of Raneshög, Flistad (see fig. 7). This bit of evidence can possibly also strengthen Bengt Råslede's theory that the nearby Raneshögar mentioned in the preceding chapter are also of the same period and were placed to represent the 24 characters of the Elder futhark, as there were clearly Old Norse speaking peoples already inhabiting the area around Odeshög during the period preceding that of the adoption and use of the Younger futhark.

Another form of information quickly available by closer study of rune stones can be provided by the artwork or designs and symbols accompanying, and in many cases encasing and intertwining the runes themselves. Several unique styles of artwork depicting snakes, dragons and crosses, amongst other things, developed during the Viking period within Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Such variations in form, technique and style are quickly identifiable to a trained eye and can help relatively date a stone and sometimes provide other important information, even if no other information is available as to its original context. Some stones can even be dated by the fact that a previously known rune master carved and signed the stone (Lundberg 1997, p. 25).

The rune stones in Vadsbo Hundred and Västergötland County in general are what have historically given archaeologists and historians their greatest amount of specific information on the Viking Age peoples in the area, due to the lack of other types of remaining historical records from the period. Though the total number of stones may not be as great as the stones found in other parts of Sweden, particularly Uppland County on the east coast, nor their artistic or esthetic value seen as quite as developed or complex, the rune stones of Vadsbo Hundred contain every bit as much scientific and historic value as their counterparts in other areas, and are mostly less “beautiful” simply because they belong to a slightly older, less pictorially dynamic phase of stone carving (Wideen 1955, p. 89).



Fig. 7 All of the known rune stones within Vadsbo Hundred marked at their original locations. Stone with Elder futhark characters at Flistad marked with a triangle. (Wideen 1955 p. 99.)

There are 18 documented runic inscriptions in stone within Vadsbo Hundred. Of these, 17 are to be found on rune stones with the other sole inscription (Vg. 10) being found on a tomb lid (Svärdström 1958, p. 1). A map, with their original placements marked within the Hundred can be found in fig. 7. Several examples have been historically moved to museums and other locations for preservation. The dating on all of the stones with the exception of the example at Flistad with the Elder runes can likely be placed between the ends of the 10th century to the mid-11th century (Lundberg 1997 p. 27). A full list of all of the individual stones as well as their original locations and inscriptions is as follows:

Stone number: Vg. 1 Location: Parish Graveyard, Bergs Parish

Inscription: "... carved these runes ..."

Stone number: Vg. 2 Location: Torstenstorp, Ullervads Parish

Inscription: Side A: "Björn raised this stone ... erected this bridge for ..."

Side B: "... his and for Jorun ..."

Stone number: Vg. 3 Location: Armeneby, Bällefors Parish

Inscription: "Tumme and his brother raise this stone for his father Torsten"

Stone number: Vg. 4 Location: Stora Ek, Eks Parish

Inscription: "Udd, Poet raised this stone for Torsten, his son, and erected a bridge for him. He owned three hammarskifte farms and thirty marks for Erik"

Stone number: Vg. 5 Location: Magatan, Flistads Parish

Inscription: "ga—rnr̥tgla" (This inscription has not been translated with any certainty and is a fragmentary example of a runic script written in the Old Norse Elder futhark.)

Stone number: Vg. 6 Location: Fägre, Fägre Parish

Inscription: "Anund and Torsten, they raised this stone ..."

Stone number: Vg. 7 Location: Vallby, Sörgården, Götlunda Parish

Inscription: “Grim raised the stone for Halvdan, his relative”

Stone number: Vg. 8 Location: Hjälstads church, Hjälstads Parish

Inscription: “Getting raised this stone for Germund, his brother, a good free farmer. God helped”

Stone number: Vg. 9 Location: Parish Graveyard, Leksbergs Parish

Inscription: “Gunnur raised this stone for Olov Nacke, Torkels father”

Stone number: Vg. 10 Location: Parish Graveyard, Leksbergs Parish

Inscription: “Priest Torsten”

Stone number: Vg. 11 Location: Leksbergs backe, Leksbergs Parish

Inscription: “Tore Skorpa raised this stone for his son Kättil”

Stone number: Vg. 12 Location: Hindsberg, Storegården, Leksbergs Parish

Inscription: Side A: “Olov Nacke raised ... fifteen farms ... “

Side B: “ ... all who might violate Göt ... “

Stone number: Vg. 13 Location: Karleby, Nolgården, Leksbergs Parish

Inscription: “Tore Skorpa raised this stone for his son Kättil and for Oluv, his daughter in law”

Stone number: Vg. 14 Location: Rogstorp, Lyrestads Parish

Inscription: “Hätting and Härvard, they raised this stone for Gunnar, their father”

Stone number: Vg. 15 Location: Sunnevad, Mariestads Parish

Inscription: “Roar raised this stone for Tore, his son”

Stone number: Vg. 16 Location: Frölunda, Mellomgården, Tidavads Parish

Inscription: “Åste and his brother raised this stone for Tore, their father”

Stone number: Vg. 17 Location: Skeberga, Torsö Parish

Inscription: “Viking performed ... for his daughter ... performed for ... for Björn, his brother, and raised this stone for Torsten, his brother; for son and brother and relative”

Stone number: Vg. 106 Location: Karleby, Lassegården, Leksbergs Parish

Inscription: “ ... make the memorial marker for Tora, their mother ... “

Upon studying the list of the rune stones from the Hundred as well as their original placements, I found probable evidence of “Odal” (right to inheritances through several generations) (Zachrisson 1994, p. 224) inheritances specifically being stated in addition to stone placement, to help strengthen claims, in stones Vg. 12, located at Hindsberg in Leksbergs parish (although the script is quite fragmentary), and also Vg. 4, located at Stora Ek in Eks Parish. There is seemingly also a few potential “persons of importance” identified within the Hundred, having been distinguished as such by having been named in more than one stone each, or by being named a considerable inheritance in one of the stones.

First, is a certain “Tore Skorpa” mentioned in stones Vg. 11 and Vg.13 as having raised both of the stones. One to his son “Kättil” at Leksbergs backe in Leksbergs parish, and another to the same “Kättil” but also his wife, Skorpa’s daughter in law “Oluv” at Karleby, also in Leksbergs Parish.

The second potential “person of importance” noticed by studying the list was “Udd, Poet” mentioned in stone Vg. 4, who was wealthy enough to erect a bridge, owned three farms, and had thirty marks reserved for his sons inheritance.

The final potential “person of importance” who could also have been a very wealthy magnate is “Olov Nacke” mentioned in stone Vg. 9 at Leksbergs Parish’s graveyard as being father to a certain “Torkel” and also as possibly owning an impressive 15 farms in stone Vg. 12. Also of interest in connection to this “Olov Nacke” is the fact that his stone also carries a stern warning to any potential violators of his families’ right to inheritance. This warning, along with the large number of farms seemingly being willed over to a unknown successor/successors seem to myself to be strong indicators of an individual with a considerable amount of wealth and influence in the area of Vadsbo Hundred during the Viking Age.

One can also ascertain from the rune stones that two bridges were erected in Vadsbo Hundred during the period: One at Torstens torp in Ullervads parish (Vg. 2) and another at Stora Ek in Eks Parish (Vg. 4).

However, of all the information gained from all of the individual rune stones in Vadsbo Hundred, that of greatest importance to the focus area of this paper, the area surrounding Odens sjö is thus: The only rune stone in the entire area of Vadsbo Hundred that exhibits an inscription using the characters of the Elder Futhark is located at the site of Flistad, near to the eastern shore of Odens sjö. In addition to its central location in the focus area, Flistad is a site featuring an early Christian church, and a large burial mound, Ranes Hög. The fact that a rune stone is located at Flistad featuring the Elder futhark, in addition to the other features which will be discussed later in this paper, helps establish it as a likely important place for the area with ties going back even prior to the Viking Age proper. One is certainly tempted to imagine early practitioners of the Old Norse faith establishing themselves in the area during the Iron Age, building their farms, and establishing their holy places of worship which they believed to be tied to the life and magic of the God Odin, even before the Viking Age proper began.

Ranes stenar, also believed to possibly have a beginning construction and usage date even preceding the Viking Age, and as having ties to the characters of the Elder Futhark, is located less than two kilometers directly northeast of the site of the rune stone, and are even visible from the top of Ranes hög at Flistad (Råsled 2005, p. 9). Were the two sites related to each other even at this earlier period? Was the area surrounding Odens sjö already a place of Odin worship even during this earlier period? It would at least seem be possible, and the site at Flistad will be revisited in later sections of this paper to further explore this possibility.

4.2 The burial mounds of the Hundred and their locations

Approximately 50 burial mounds dating to the late Iron Age lie within the boundaries of Vadbo Hundred. Some of these are located in a singular context and others in larger complexes or gravefields (Rää Fornsök, 2011). A mapping of the mounds in the Hundred in relation to known rune stones in order to possibly see a pattern, or clues to locations of farms and cult sites, due to their known pattern of placement often near to, or at, sites of large mounds or mound complexes has been undertaken.

The largest, and only “stor hög” in the Hundred, Ranes hög, is six meters tall and 20 meters wide. It is located at Flistad, a site east of Odens sjö, in the focus area. “Stor högar” are much larger than typical burial mounds and are believed to be tied to aristocracy, or individuals of heightened status within late Iron Age society, as are all mounds in general (Zachrisson 1994, p.226). This mound with its associated early church and rune stone are in my opinion the best candidate from the archaeological record for the burial place of local elite with a magnate farm nearby, as a large mound would seem to indicate a person of high status in life possibly establishing their kindred’s right of inheritance in the area.

Was “Ranes hög” the burial place and “Odal” mound of an individual or kindred who had a farm at Flistad? Or could it rather be that local elites held, and ran several farms in the area from a magnate farm at Vad, “Vadsbo”, which the entire latter Hundred was named after? The modern villiage of Vad, where “Vadsbo” was likely situated, is only two kilometers to the East, and has no mound of its own. Ranes stenar lies less than two kilometers to the north of both sites. This idea of a magnate farm with associated outlying farms, and religious sites certainly seems at least to be a possible scenario for the area, and will be touched upon again, with evidence given in order to support this possibility in my conclusions.

4.3 The surface finds of the Hundred and their locations

One way of helping to plot out locations of possible farms or cult sites in use during the late Iron Age is denoting surface finds and depositions of weapons, tools, jewelry and coins in the landscape. To date, there have been no depositions of the classic silver hoards of the Viking period found within Vadsbo Hundred. There have, however, been surface finds made of iron, silver and even gold. In Harald Wideen’s book “Western-Swedish Viking Age Studies”, Wideen divides Iron Age surface artifacts into two categories: Weapons/tools and Jewelry (Wideen 1955, p. 63). Both types are to be found amongst the surface finds in Vadsbo. For practical purposes, I will also use this division method in my paper.

In the Weapons/tools category are two swords dating to the late Iron Age that have been found within the Hundred. Interestingly, of the two, one was found within the focus area of this paper. A single-edged sword was found at Svenneby, on the North shore of Odens sjö, and an ornate pommel from a double-edged sword was found at St. Ek, near the shores of the river Tidan, northwest of Odens sjö (Wideen 1955, p. 61).

In the Jewelry category are two very interesting finds: a silver ring with an attached Thor's hammer amulet found in 1889 in a bog at Lungnås, northwest of Odens sjö in the westernmost section of Vadsbo Hundred, and of particular interest to this paper; the gold ring found at Odensåker, located in the focus area, near to the Western shores of Odens sjö (Wideen 1955, p. 79).

The ring found at Odensåker is made of fine and thicker golden strands interlaced and wound together to form what has been classified as an “earring”. This could be the right classification as its form seems to suggest this function, and also as two others very similar to it have been found in buried contexts in other parts of Västergötland County (Wideen 1955, p. 79). It is of particular interest to this paper not only for it having been found within the focus area, but also for having been found at one of the identified Odin cult-related sites. I find it tempting to consider the possibility that this obviously “valuable” object could somehow have been involved with people worshipping at Odensåker, or perhaps even as an offering, or grave good in-and-of itself.



Fig. 9 The golden “earring” Found at Odensåker, near Odens sjö. SHM 19021:1 (Wideen 1955, fig. 133.)

Upon reviewing the late Iron Age surface finds from Vadsbo Hundred, it is of interest to note that of all of the finds in this relatively large Hundred, two of the four known were found within the much smaller focus area of this paper, with one of the objects being “valuable” and found at a probable cult site. This information could be interpreted as possibly strengthening my theory that the area was an important place within Vadsbo Hundred, and perhaps even the larger surrounding landscape during the late Iron Age; that Odens sjö could have been cult-activity center, with associated magnate farm and sites related to the worship of the God Odin.

4.4 The early churches of the Hundred and their locations

Vadsbo Hundred is home to more than 50 churches with their beginnings dating to the early medieval period. Essentially every small village in Vadsbo Hundred had its own church by the beginning of the medieval period (Ekbom 1983, p. 16.). This is due to several factors, but a general pattern that applies to early medieval “Sweden” will be presented to help give an understanding of the organization and make-up of Vadsbo at the end of the Viking Age, with a focus on the churches surrounding Odens sjö. It is however important to remember that variations occurred in organization throughout Scandinavia at the time, there was no “Sweden” as we know it, only regional kings and organizational structures.

The first Christian missions in “Sweden” took place during the 9th century, when the Viking Age was already in full-swing. As the first Christian church buildings were constructed in what is now southern Sweden in the 10th century the religion steadily spread and took-hold northwards (Anglert 1995, p. 10).

The building of churches in Scandinavia during the Viking Age into the early medieval period can be seen as having three phases: A first phase took place in connection with magnate farms with no official church influence; a church, usually built of wood, was built by the king, or magnate as a part of his personal estate. The second phase, which took place during the end of the 11th and the 12th centuries, is characterized by a more active church organization; the church was actively working with the local kings and magnates to create order and solidify their new kingdoms by erecting new stone “power churches” at strategic locations, for example; villages formed from grouping earlier farms, belonging to the crown. The final phase can be seen as the medieval system of parishes is established (Anglert 1995, p. 11).

So what of the churches surrounding Odens sjö in Vadsbo Hundred? Can they tell us anything about the organization or make-up of the Viking Age society that was established there at the end of the Viking period? I have chosen to take a closer look at dates and locations of the five closest-lying churches to the lake, with Vad as a focal point, in order to possibly gain a better understanding of the area.

First, is the church at Vad, the village which is namesake of the Hundred, and its purported late Iron Age-Medieval period administrative center, located approximately three kilometers east of Odens sjö (see fig. 1 for all church locations). It has its beginnings as a Romanesque stone church from the 12th century and still exhibits its early medieval belfry (Linde 1982, p. 54).

Second, almost three kilometers immediately to the south of Vads church is the church at Götlunda. The original church at Götlunda was destroyed by fire in 1670. It was also originally a Romanesque stone church dating to the 12th century, and still retains its original Romanesque baptismal font. An Iron Age graveyard and rune stone are also to be found at Götlunda. Perhaps most interesting of all is the churches original iron-clad door which was ornate with a runic inscription which read thus: “Anund. The holy Virgin is my peace. Forever young she overcomes my natural death. Anund decorated the door.” (Linde 1982, p. 55). The site has a long history with ties going back at least to the Iron Age.

Third, approximately two kilometers west and laterally in-between the churches at Vad and Götlunda, near to the original eastern shore of Odens sjö, is the church at Flistad. Flistad church and its tower were completely destroyed by fire in 1706, but are believed to have been constructed in the 12th or early 13th centuries. Of great importance is the fact that a large burial mound six meters tall, and 20 meters wide, Ranes hög, from the late Iron Age, as well as a rune stone bearing characters of the Elder futhark are located within the same site as the church. These facts suggest a very old and established tradition of Flistad being an important place even long before the early medieval church was constructed (Linde 1982, p. 55).

Fourth, located almost directly across the lake from Flistad, near to the original western shore of Odens sjö is the church at Odensåker. The original church at Odensåker was destroyed by fire, but was Romanesque and built in the 12th century. It also retains an original baptismal font from the same period (Linde 1982, p. 41).

Lastly, is the church at Sveneby, located near to the north shore of Odens sjö. It is believed to have a construction date post to the medieval period. However, it is of note that it houses an early medieval baptismal font, and a crucifix dated to 1120, believed to have come from the ruined church at Kivenäbben, in-between Sveneby and Odensåker, near the western shore of Odens sjö (Linde 1982, p. 47).

After conducting this brief study I believe the information gained from the churches surrounding Odens sjö could be seen as thus: It is known that early medieval stone churches were often placed near the same site, or even directly on top of earlier wooden churches from the Viking Age. We also know that these earlier wooden churches were often built by local kings or magnates for their own private use, often in connection with the other buildings at their farms, or cult centers (Anglert 1995, p. 19).

If we use the church at Vad as a site-marker for an earlier magnate farm, or center for administrative and possibly even religious elite in the area surrounding Odens sjö, it then becomes possible to look at the other churches dating back to the early medieval period as markers for other farms, or cult sites possibly associated with this “Vadsbo” in the area. All the other churches in this study, with the exception of Sveneby, could be seen as filling the criteria required for likely associated farm, or cult locations, and they will be touched upon again in my conclusions.

4.5 The magnate farms of the Hundred and their locations

Due to the fact that there have not been any major archaeological investigations conducted on any suspected Viking Age farms within Vadsbo Hundred, it is not possible to know with absolute certainty exactly where any magnate farms existed. It is however, possible to plot-out possible sites due to clues obtained from place-names, early medieval sources, rune stones, artifacts and general known settlement-patterns from other areas of Sweden during the period.

Upon reviewing all of the clues I compiled in the previous chapters I would propose that there was at least one magnate farm with both administrative and possibly religious authority within Vadsbo Hundred, that was associated with many other subordinate or allied farms, and it was located within the focus area at the village of Vad, “Vads bo” (Ekbohm 1983, p. 21). My reasons for this are numerous, and will be stated in context, and in reference to other locations in the focus area in my conclusions.

5. Conclusions

The area surrounding Lake Östen, previously known as Odens sjö, in Vadsbo Hundred, Västergötland County, Sweden was an area of importance within the surrounding landscape during the late Iron Age. The reasons for this are numerous and have come to light during the course of my writing this paper.

People were located in the area at least as early as the Vendel Period(550-800 A.D.) and perhaps even earlier, as evidenced by the rune stone exhibiting characters of the Elder futhark(not in use after 800 A.D.), located at the multi-component site of Flistad, near to the eastern shore of Odens sjö. This definitive older dating, as well as a possible relation to Ranestenen, at near-by Askeberga, further help to establish a pre-Viking Age population already placing an importance on claiming and establishing the area even at this earlier phase.

In this paper my focus has been on attempting to establish a connection between the late Iron Age/Viking Age population of Vadsbo Hundred, particularly in the focus area which I established as being that immediately surrounding Odens sjö, and a possible Oden cult being in operation within the area. In connection with this, I have attempted to locate any magnate farms within the Hundred, as possible administrative and possibly even religious/cult centers.

My findings were thus: I believe that it is possible, even likely that Odin worshipping cult-activities were taking place in the area surrounding Odens sjö during the late Iron Age. These activities likely had ties to a tradition going back even before the beginning of the Viking Age in the area and are seen in evidence in the numerous Odin name-references at many of the area's natural, and man-made features, at a relatively high frequency.

I propose that places such as Odens sjö, Odenslunda, Götlunda, Odensåker, Ranestenen, Raneshögen, and a magnate farm at the modern village of Vad, the so-called "Vadsbo" were all places, again both natural and man-made, that had ties to and served functions within this local cult-belief system. They all served in different ways to strengthen and hold together a belief that some sort of a strong tie to the God Odin was in evidence in their surroundings; so strong that even a representation of his own hall in Asgård, Valhalla, was constructed at Askeberga to show their faith in these ties.

I believe that a magnate farm, “Vads bo” was located at the site of the modern village of Vad, with social elites practicing the “hall” form of Odin worship, possibly also at the site of Ranesténar, approximately three kilometers east of the original eastern shore of Odens sjö; and that it was this farm, with its magnates and possibly even spiritual elites, which served an administrative and possibly even cult-authoritative position within the area. I would also propose that there were probably many other farms in the area, amongst others, those likely located at Götlunda to the south, and Flistad, and Odensåker to the west, which all had ties to this magnate farm, and the Oden cult tradition in the area. All of these sites fit nicely within the focus area, and also exhibit features tying them to the right period, and pattern of possible farm/cult site.

As the Christianizing of the area began, and early stone churches were erected at many of the old farm and cult sites, places such as Ranesténar and Odenslunda likely began lose their original importance, as the old ways gave way to the new. The magnate farm at Vad eventually became an administrative center according to the new medieval pattern, and the area surrounding Odens sjö became part of the new Vadsbo Hundred. It is interesting that “Vads bo” seemingly never lost its position as an important royal domain, ever since its establishment during the late Iron Age.

6. Summary

This paper focused on the Viking Age population of Vadsbo Hundred, located in present day Västergötland County, in western Sweden. An effort was undertaken to document all of the place-name references to Odin regarding both natural features, and Viking farms, settlements and monuments, including a full documentation and location-comparison all the known rune stones within Vadsbo Hundred. This was also done in order to help establish the theory that there was an Odin cult in place in the area during the Viking Age which had a strong influence on the local population as well as the settlement patterns within the area.

Archaeological features such as burial mounds, early churches and surface finds dating to the period were also studied and documented in order to help establish the possible Odin cult activities in Vadsbo. Most of this information was limited to the focus area of the paper: the area surrounding Odens sjö.

Evidence was also gathered which pointed to a magnate farm being in control over the area, located at the modern village of Vad, known during the Iron Age as “Vads bo” and that it was this farm, with its magnates and possibly even spiritual elites, which served an administrative and possibly even cult-authoritative position within the area. This farm was also found to have kept an authoritative position even up to and during the social and economic changes of the middle ages.

References

- Anglert, Mats 1995 *Kyrkor och herravälde*. Lund
- Billing, Kerstin 1983 *Vadsbo härad kring år 1000: Om nya maktfaktorers inverkan på bygdestrukturen*. Göteborg
- Brink, Stefan 1996 Political and Social Structures in Early Scandinavia. A Settlement-historical Pre-study of the Central Place. *Tor* 28. Uppsala
- Ekbom, Carl Axel 1983 *Västergötland under sen vikingatid: Det äldsta Sveariket*. Stockholm
- Jones, Gwyn 1984 *A History of The Vikings*. Oxford
- Lindblom, Verner 1982 *Götland, Sveriges vagga?* Skaraborgsbygden
- Linde, Gunnar 1982 *Ortnamn och kulturminnen kring sjön Östen*. Skövde
- Lundberg, Stig 1997 *Gravmonument i sten från sen vikingatid och äldre medeltid i Västergötland*. Göteborg
- Nordberg, Andreas 2003 *Krigarna i Odins sal*. Stockholm
- Näsström, Britt-Mari 2001 *Fornskandinavisk religion*. Lund
- O'Donoghue, Heather 2007 *From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of The Norse Myths*. London
- Råsled, Bengt 2005 *Ranstena: Monumental hallsättning för Odenkulten i Askeberga by, Vadsbo härad i Västergötland*. Stockholm
- Svärdström, Elisabeth 1958 *Västergötlands runinskrifter*. Stockholm

Wideen, Harald 1955 *Västsvenska vikingatidsstudier*. Göteborg

Zachrisson, Torun 1994 The Odal and its Manifestation in the Landscape. *Current Swedish Archaeology*, Vol. 2. Stockholm

www.raa.se 2011 *Fornsök Vadsbo*: burial mound locations in the landscape

www.sv.wikipedia.org 2011 *Oden*: Odin image

Lantmäteriet, 2008 *Terrängkartan 577 Mariestad*. Gävle



Stockholms
universitet