

## 2 From Slavery to Tenant Farming

### Elite Economies in the Nordic Area c. 1050–1250

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The aim of this chapter is to investigate changes in settlement organization and land use on the main farms in Scandinavia, brought about by the introduction of a new type of economy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This economy was based on the rental of resources, which furthered the separation between farming and ownership. According to Peter Carelli, the twelfth century was characterized by an emerging “capitalist spirit,”<sup>1</sup> but it was not until the thirteenth century that this new economy became visible on a larger societal scale.

The issues under investigation include the organization of new tenants’ settlements on former slave-driven land, their features and characteristics, as well as the role of monasteries and the Church in this land reform. The hypothesis investigated is that former nucleated village-like settlements were scattered across the landscape when the demesne of a former large manor was split into rentable land units.

When slavery was abolished, a tenant system was introduced, employing around twenty percent of the population—those who had previously been slaves.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the urban economy grew. Credit systems evolved, and ownership of townhouses and town land was separated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, royal privilege strategy evolved, which functioned almost like a system built on concessions.<sup>4</sup> The administration of royal resources and the collection of taxes and fines became an important source of income for the new “state elites.” The economic basis of the Scandinavian elites changed from direct involvement in farming on estates to the letting of land, and some of the most powerful also gained lucrative positions within the state. These people combined estate development with important state assignments, thereby creating new practices and possibilities for influencing politics.

Here follows an investigation of the material basis of one of Norway’s mightiest dynasties, that of Erling Skakke (1115–79), a Norwegian earl who was married to the daughter of King Sigurd I Jorsalfare (“Jerusalem-Farer,” r. 1103–30), and his son Magnus Erlingsson (r. 1161–84), who became king of Norway in 1163. In this chapter, this family and their ancestors will be referred to as the Etne dynasty, after their native home of Etne, in western Norway’s Sunnhordland. The changes that took place at

the estate of the Etne dynasty when the family gained royal status can be traced both archaeologically and historically.<sup>5</sup> Archaeological investigation recently revealed an Iron Age settlement, and this chapter will compare the nature of this farm to both the evidence from the Middle Ages and written sources. This case study can illuminate the great and complex changes in Norwegian and Scandinavian agriculture in the twelfth century, the time when the new economy was emerging. In the concluding section, the Etne estate will be placed in a wider societal context.

Recent research has shown that there were large estates in the Viking Age<sup>6</sup> and that society did not consist entirely of egalitarian farmers with a few household slaves. There were complex production systems, socially and economically interwoven, that could include as many as several dozen settlements. Such manorial systems could have one or more main farms with surrounding subsidiaries. The social differentiation on these estates varied from the master and mistress at the top to the male and female slaves at the bottom.

Estimates indicate that slavery in Scandinavia before the thirteenth century encompassed about one-fifth of the population, or slightly more. However, the exact numbers are uncertain. In England, slaves (or slave families) are recorded at the village level in the Domesday Book (1086). If counted as heads of households, the c. 28,000 slaves made up just over ten percent of the recorded population. There were major regional variations within England. For example, slavery was more common in the middle and inner parts of Kent than in coastal eastern Kent. In general, slavery was more prevalent in southwest England than in the east of England. We should also expect substantial variation in western Norway, both regionally and over time. Compared to the inland regions, slavery was, in all likelihood, more common in the coastlands, as indicated by property structure and the large royal and ecclesiastical estates found here in the late Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup>

These estates were transformed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when slavery was abolished. This presumably entailed highly complex processes, perhaps comparable to the other big reorganizing process of the last millennium, the so-called Great Land Reform (Enclosure) that took place between 1821/59 and c. 1940. Enclosure created the modern rural farming and settlement structure of western and northern Norway. Every unit of land on every estate was concentrated around new dwellings, replacing an intricate system where everyone had a share of the estate's land and resources and where all settlements were clustered together, resembling villages. The abolition of slavery, however, set the scene for settlement structure from the twelfth/thirteenth until the twentieth century and will be investigated here.

The abolition of slavery clearly changed the lives of the slaves who instead became tenants, but how did it affect conditions and the way of life for elites? Which strategies did the elites choose to restructure and revitalize old estates and practices as the new economy was introduced?

Erling Skakke appears to have granted both Gjerde and another estate to Halsnøy monastery in the 1160s when his son Magnus Erlingsson was crowned. This chapter involves a detailed investigation into Erling Skakke's circumstances and examines how one of Norway's largest estates, which belonged to perhaps the most powerful man in the kingdom, was incorporated into what was to become the richest monastery in the country.

## Background

Archaeologists and historians' view of Norway in the period c. 800–1100 has changed drastically since the mid-1990s. The historian Jørn Sandnes described it as almost a paradigm shift.<sup>8</sup> A primary concern has been the degree of feudal attributes and estate clustering in the Iron and Middle Ages in comparison to conditions elsewhere in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

The anthology *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia* (2011) is an important contribution to the Scandinavian debate, which, to a large degree, also includes Denmark. The Danish historian Bjørn Poulsen and the Danish archaeologist Søren Sindbæk emphasize the importance of archaeological investigation at estates such as Gudme, Fyn, and Lejre, as well as Slöinge, Toftegård, Järrestad, Uppåkra, and Tissø, and how it has changed conceptions about estate organization. They argue that divided estates, with large manors and subsidiaries—termed *le domaine bipartite* by Belgian scholar Adrian Verhulst—existed in Scandinavia during the Viking Age.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the main differences between new and old research are the increased focus on social hierarchies, as reflected in settlements and landscape, and the examination of the Scandinavian situation in a wider European context. Increasingly within historical archaeology, written sources and retrospective analyses are combined with material culture to shed light on the social and political organization of Iron Age society.<sup>11</sup>

European research on landownership and estate systems was shaped during the interwar period, within a structuralist discourse from a basic historical materialist perspective: the French *Annales* School. Important researchers, e.g., Marc Bloch in the interwar period and Georges Duby from the 1960s to 1990, have been essential to the development of estate history in western Europe. Bloch claimed that feudal society existed only between the Loire and the Rhine, not in the “free Germania” of the north.<sup>12</sup> This formalist perspective has lost its relevance, and the French historians never studied Scandinavian conditions. The new approach nevertheless inspired Scandinavian agricultural historians, who envisaged a rapid transition from freehold farming in the Viking Age to tenant farming in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although they did not problematize these issues. Today their views are largely outdated.

Tore Iversen's doctoral thesis about slavery in Norway (1997) started the debate regarding Scandinavian estate systems during the

Viking Age.<sup>13</sup> Its strengths lay in his comparative approach and ability to reinterpret existing empirical data. Iversen's ideas regarding older hierarchical systems of entitlement and the development toward newer "factual economic" ties is still predominant and can be applied across the entire Nordic area. There was no absolute right to property up to the middle of the twelfth century but instead a hierarchical system, where personal status permeated every tier of society. In a predominantly rural society, the practices regarding right to land were determined hierarchically and applied to everyone, although property was unevenly distributed.<sup>14</sup>

In my own PhD thesis, I investigated a selection of west Norwegian royal manors. A primary issue was how the king changed a rural, ambulating power base to a more permanently based urban one. This was discussed in the context of early state formation.<sup>15</sup> This process was traced through the study of patterns of landownership around the royal manors as these were transferred to the new ecclesiastical institutions in Bergen in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The medieval rural royal manors served as residences for ambulating kings and were administered by the officials known as *ármaðr*.<sup>16</sup> Rural, decentralized governance characterized most European kingdoms prior to and during the early Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup> Similar systems were in place in Java, Hawaii, Tahiti, and Indonesia during the fourteenth century, as well as in Morocco and Ethiopia from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries.<sup>18</sup> Ambulating kingdoms were almost a global norm for organizing early kingship in agricultural societies. The surplus and resources of these agricultural societies were consumed by the traveling king's warriors and the elites. The actual presence of the king at certain times of the year helped sustain and sanction royal power.

I have previously identified fifty-two royal manors, fifty *lendr maðr* estates, and fifty-two *huseby* farms in Norwegian written sources predating the fourteenth century.<sup>19</sup> In the so-called Olav's text in the Gulathing Law, i.e., the regulations attributed to King Olav Haraldsson (r. 1015–28), it is stated that the royal officials, *ármaðr* and *lendr maðr*, were responsible for the collection of fines on the behalf of the king in their respective administrative districts (*sýsla*).<sup>20</sup> The *lendr maðr* were military leaders from prominent families, more or less equivalent to English barons—the trusted men of the king with delegated royal authority within their own districts.<sup>21</sup> The fines were probably stored at the *huseby* farms together with taxes (such as the levy fleet taxation).<sup>22</sup> This decentralized storage system operated from at least the eleventh century until the fourteenth century, when new centralized royal urban castles in Norway such as Bohus, Akershus, Tønsberghus, Bergenhushus, and Vardøhus took over the functions of the *huseby* farms. The semiroyal manors of the *lendr maðr* were the leading aristocratic and royal centers in each region. Together, the royal manors and the semiroyal manors—and the *huseby* storage system—formed the main structure of the decentralized rural state.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, towns and castles took over as primary power bases. In Norway, Konghelle, Borg, Oslo, Tønsberg, Bergen, and Nidaros became the most important royal towns. Royal power was thus centralized and “urbanized,” and taxes and levies were now brought to the royal castles instead of being stored at the regional *huseby* farms. During the period leading up to the thirteenth century, many rural royal manors and their estates were handed over to ecclesiastical institutions controlled by the king.

From c. 1015 to 1308 a total of seventy-eight *lendr maðr* are known from western Norway, including the *fylki* (shire) of Agder.<sup>23</sup> Of these, sixty-five men, i.e., eighty-three percent, can be connected to a *fylki*, a district, or a farm.<sup>24</sup> According to saga tradition, Gjerde is one of eight *lendr maðr* estates in western Norway that can be linked to events from the eleventh century onward. This gives Gjerde the same rank as older high-status centers, such as Sola and Finnøy in Rogaland, Aurland in Sogn, and Giske on Møre, which were all homes of chieftain families in close contact with the king and with one another. Agriculturally, Etne is one of western Norway’s most productive areas north of Jæren, Rogaland. The other power centers are also located on fertile farmland with access to excellent fishing and outfields. How was an elite district such as Gjerde organized, and how did this change within the new economy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries?

### Gjerde: An Example of Transformation to the New Economy

Various sagas tell us about the Etne dynasty over a period of two hundred years. The family’s history begins with Bjorn from Støle—presumably a “*hirð* man” (retinue member, follower) of King Olav Tryggvason in the 990s—and ends with King Magnus Erlingsson, who died at the Battle of Fimreite in 1183/84. The *lendr maðr* Erlend of Gjerde in Etne (d. 1030) was an ally of King Knud II the Great (r. 1018–35) and was one of the leaders in the coalition who fought against Olav II Haraldsson (later canonized as St Olav) at Stiklestad in 1030. Presumably it is this Erlend who is said to have raised a stone over his father Olve, as stated on a rune stone found near Gjerde church.<sup>25</sup> The fact that around one hundred years later King Harald Gille (r. 1130–36) let one of his sons (Magnus) be raised by Kyrpinga Ormr Sveinsson at Støle in Etne also signals the close connection between this family and royal power. The marriage of Erling Skakke to Kristin (d. 1178), daughter of King Sigurd Jerusalem-Farer and Queen Malmfrid, in the early 1150s is another sign of the family’s prominence. However, the political climax of the Etne dynasty was reached when Erling’s son Magnus was crowned in 1163/64. Magnus, as a child of a legitimate royal daughter and a grandchild of King Sigurd, was seen by the Church as an acceptable successor.

Both Støle and Gjerde were connected to the Etne dynasty. Snorri Sturluson specifically mentions that the great-grandfather of Erling, Svein Erlendsson, lived at Gjerde,<sup>26</sup> and *Orkneyinga saga*, from the late twelfth century or early thirteenth century, states that Erling's father, Kyrpinga Ormr, lived at Støle.<sup>27</sup> Erling was the most powerful man in Norway in the 1160s and controlled the kingdom's army, navy, and royal manors.<sup>28</sup> Apart from Støle, which may have formed a type of Crown land (*bona regalia*), Erling seems to have owned large family estates at Etne and other places in Sunnhordland. This inheritance came to form the core of Halsnøy monastery's landholdings<sup>29</sup> (see Figure 2.1).

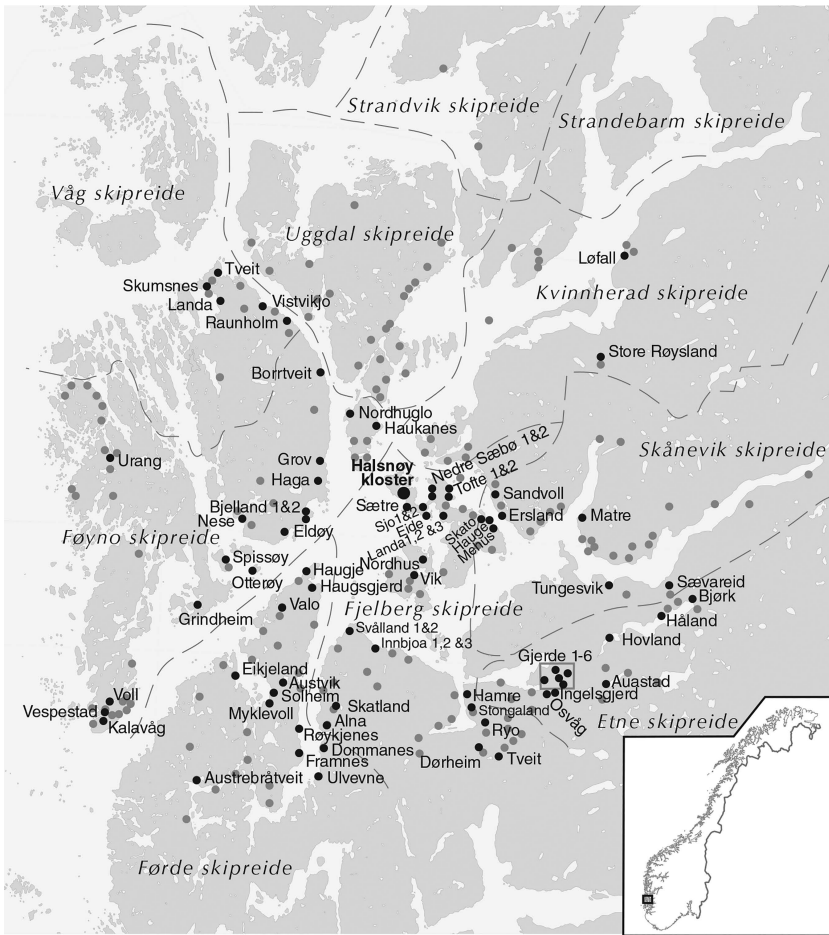


Figure 2.1 The medieval estate of Halsnøy monastery recorded in 1614

Source: Map created by Reidar A. Fossum

Note: Farms marked black had standardized the land rent according to *mannsverk* calculations. This may indicate some of the early estate of the monastery.

In 1855, P. A. Munch claimed that the Gjerde family moved to Støle because their estate had been confiscated by King Magnus II den Gode (“the Good,” r. 1035–47), presumably after Erlend’s betrayal and fight against King Olav Haraldsson.<sup>30</sup> I believe it is more likely that Gjerde was granted to Halsnøy monastery by Erling Skakke in the 1160s, according to a trustworthy tradition recorded in a sixteenth-century source, *Bergens Fundas* (c. 1560). According to this tradition, Erling founded the Augustinian monastery at Halsnøy in Sunnhordland in 1163/4 and presumably provided it with land.<sup>31</sup> By the end of the Middle Ages, this monastery was the richest in the kingdom, with over 250 farms, of which most were concentrated around the Hardanger fjord. When it was sold in 1752, the total estate included 219 properties (whole farms and parts of farms) in Sunnhordland, fifty-five in Rogaland (most of them concentrated around the ninth- to twelfth-century royal farm of Avaldsnes), and fifty-nine post-Reformation properties in Hardanger (a former bishop’s estate).<sup>32</sup>

The written sources dealing with the Halsnøy monastic estate are unfortunately relatively recent, and only one cadaster, from 1614, remains. Gjerde and several other farms in Etne and the neighboring areas were included in the monastic estate.<sup>33</sup> Gjerde seems to have been in the hands of magnates until c. 1100, as suggested by a runic inscription on a 2.25-meter stone found in the churchyard wall at Gjerde. The inscription reads as follows (in normalized Old Norwegian): “ketil seti stein iena ebtir fin mak sin” (Ketill placed this stone after Finn, his son-in-law).<sup>34</sup> Neither of these people is known from other sources, but the inscription has been dated, based on the language, to the twelfth century or possibly a little earlier,<sup>35</sup> i.e., the period between the lives of Erlend (d. 1030) and Erling Skakke. Judging by the available sources, it seems likely that the move to a new main farm took place in the time of Svein Sveinsson and that Finn represents a line of the family that remained at Gjerde.

During the 1500s, land rent in Norway was paid in more than seventy different ways (secondary products/various types of cerealia, animalia, fish, salt, metals, lumber, and cash rent). The various types of produce stood in a fixed exchange ratio to one another, and the land rent from a certain farm can be recalculated to a specific value. Land rent amounted to about one-sixth of a farm’s production capacity and is a proxy for farm size. The royal taxes were also calculated on the basis of land rent. Here, I will recalculate land rent paid, as expressed in *laup*, as a representation of farm size. A *laup* was originally a wooden container for butter, equivalent to 15.4 kilograms, or 16.2 liters, of butter.

Gjerde paid a land rent of twenty-four *laup* (c. 370 kilograms), more than seven times the average of the farms at Etne in 1647.<sup>36</sup> This was one of the highest land rents in the whole of western Norway. A considerable

part of this land rent was linked to the salmon-rich Etne River, which had its estuary on the Gjerde estate. When the river changed its course in 1674, fishing was abandoned at Gjerde, and the amount of payable land rent was lowered in several stages. In 1743, it was just under nine *laup* (c. 140 kilograms),<sup>37</sup> suggesting that the salmon fishing had accounted for sixty percent of the earlier land rent value of the estate (fifteen of twenty-four *laup*).

In 2013, the University Museum of Bergen conducted a major excavation at Gjerde, which revealed buildings from the pre-Roman Iron Age, the Viking Age, and up to the middle of the twelfth century.<sup>38</sup> A total of fifty-four structures were identified. Remains of what may have been one of Erlend of Gjerde's buildings were found. The excavated area lay to the east of the medieval settlement (i.e., the historically known settlement). Nine of the excavated buildings were dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries: one longhouse, two smaller buildings, and four so-called four-post houses, which may have been a type of small workshop or economy building.

The excavation also revealed many older longhouses, of which some date to the Merovingian (CE 575–800) and Migration periods (CE 400–575), as well as a smaller building and evidence of iron production from the late Roman Iron Age (CE 200–400). A longhouse from the early Roman Iron Age (CE 1–200), an iron production complex, and five four-post houses were also investigated. However, most houses dated to the pre-Roman Iron Age (500–1 BP)—as many as twenty-one buildings, of which twelve to fourteen were interpreted as longhouses. The excavators argued that at least six farm units were in use at that time, as the longhouses were situated in pairs, suggesting different farm units.

Two thousand years later, in the fifteenth century, Gjerde comprised the named units Sæbø, Haugen, Flåte, Dyngjebakken, and Skjensvoll, in addition to its own farmyard. These units most likely replaced the older nucleated settlements. The farm name “Gjerde” was first documented in the thirteenth century and comes from ON *gerði*, fence or “walled land.”<sup>39</sup> It refers to a more than 2-kilometer-long stone wall that stretches from Sæbølia in the west to the river and Gravelseter in the east.<sup>40</sup> Together with the river and the fjord, the wall enclosed the cultivated areas of the Gjerde farm until the river changed its course in the seventeenth century.

There were six settlements/farmsteads at Gjerde in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and at least nine tenant units, i.e., units of land for hire (see Figure 2.2). There was an even larger number of households, since most of the tenant units were shared; i.e., it was not unusual for two families to farm one unit and split the tenant fee. The principle was: one farmstead could potentially consist of several tenant units and each tenant unit could potentially consist of several households.





*Figure 2.2* The settlements at the aristocratic/royal manor Gjerde, Etne, Norway seem to have been reorganized sometime after Gjerde was granted Halsnøy monastery c. 1163 by Earl Erling Skakke. Building remains from the early phase (A) (500 BCE–CE 1000) was archaeological excavated in 2013. The medieval phase (B) is reconstructed from historical records.

*Source:* The model is modified after Iversen (2008) and Diinhof and Flognfeldt (2016).

*Note:* Section of orthophoto taken in 1968 by Widerøe's Flyveselskap A/S. Statens kartverk/Universitetsbiblioteket i Bergen.

The main farmyard at Gjerde was divided into three tenant units from the seventeenth century until the land reform of 1872. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the estate had, as previously mentioned, five settlements as well as the main farm. These were Skjensvoll, Dyngjebakken, Flåte, Sæbø, and one or two dwellings at Haugen. In 1872, the estate had one hundred and fifty buildings, including thirty houses at the beach site Gjerdessjøen, which emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Both infields and outfields were part of a run-rig system for the six farms/settlements within the wall (gno. 6–11). In addition, in the nineteenth century, Gjerde shared outfields with Gravelseter, had four mills at Vågen, and a joint shieling with Engelsgjerd. These were small farms located outside the wall, but with historic links to the main farm.

According to the 1614 cadaster of Halsnøy monastery, most of its tenants in Sunnhordland paid one *laup* and one hide in rent, or double/triple that amount. This was especially evident in the vicinity of the monastery (in the parish of Eid in Fjellberg). There, fourteen out of nineteen farms, and twenty-three out of twenty-eight households, paid a standardized rent in 1614.<sup>41</sup> The rent was based on a mathematical calculation, which in the Middle Ages was called in Old Norse a *mannsverk* (man's work), based on what one household could produce. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this corresponded to a tenant fee of two *laup* and two hides. In principle, a tenant unit of four *laup* and four hides would comprise two households. Originally, the value of a cowhide was equal to the *laup*. However, a rapidly growing population needed fat, and the demand for butter increased; in the seventeenth century, a *laup* of butter was set to twice the value of a hide.

As a consequence of the plague of the mid-fourteenth century, several farms in Gjerde lay idle in the late Middle Ages. In 1519, there were only four tenant units at Gjerde, compared to seven in 1563 and eight in 1567, excluding an abandoned unit.<sup>42</sup> The 1614 Halsnøy cadaster lists eight tenant units at Gjerde and a total of fifteen households, including Skjenvoll. One of these units had only one household, but the other seven had two.<sup>43</sup> The eight tenant units listed in 1614 must be the same as those of 1567, and the ninth, Dyngjebakken, probably lay idle until c. 1620.

There are uncertainties regarding how much additional land belonged to Gjerde in the period c. 800–1150. In my earlier research, I looked at the ownership structure in the area surrounding the main farm, where I identified three separate farm clusters (blocks A, B, and D).<sup>44</sup> These could be subordinated settlements of an earlier estate belonging to Gjerde, which was divided by several owners at an unknown date. These estates paid a land rent of around 50 *laup* of butter, which is approximately twice the amount paid by Gjerde itself. This suggests that the Etne dynasty at Gjerde had significant resources at their disposal, through this large main estate and the ones surrounding it.

To summarize, the farm units at Gjerde may be of significant age. In the seventeenth century, fifteen households on nine different tenant units shared six different historically known settlements. In the pre-Roman Iron Age, there were at least six farm units or settlements. The medieval farmsteads were more spread out across the landscape compared to the nucleated Iron Age settlement. The excavations showed at least one long-house from each of the Iron Age periods, although the many farm units of the pre-Roman Iron Age cannot be traced in the later parts of the Iron Age. Parts of the excavated area were destroyed during the Second World War when a German camp was erected there. It is possible that many archaeological remains have been removed, and the representability of the excavation results is therefore uncertain. Nevertheless, there appears to have been a significant degree of continuity at the site, even if the number of farm units varied. The later eleventh- and twelfth-century houses seem to represent a final phase before a new settlement structure was established at Gjerde. The Iron Age settlement had a different location and structure from the medieval one. Is this physical settlement reorganization linked to an emerging estate tenant rental system? This will now be discussed in more detail, together with an attempt to examine Gjerde in a wider context.

### From Slavery to Tenant Farming

Slavery was being abolished at the same time that Halsnøy monastery was established in the 1160s, and it almost completely disappeared during the first half of the thirteenth century. In the 1274 National Law of Magnus Lawmender, the term *þræll* is only used once, and then in the context of an old proverb *þegn og þræll* (thegn and slave).<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the Gulathing Law, which was in use when the monastery was founded, contains many rules concerning slavery. Farms that had previously been run by slaves for their masters were at some point transformed into tenant farms. A need to define the amount of payable land rent followed. The question is whether the standardized rent paid by the tenant units at Gjerde and the estate of Halsnøy monastery was connected to an early land tax system. *Mannsverk* is mentioned in the Gulathing Law of the 1160s.<sup>46</sup> From the 1274 law, it is clear that a royal slaughter tax was assessed on the basis of the *mannsverk* until 1271.<sup>47</sup> This tax was to be brought to Bergen around Christmas, when the king visited the town. In other words, the slaughter tax appears to have been applied to tenant land, seemingly based on an assumption that tenants had their own animals and performed seasonal slaughter.

It is therefore interesting that most of the estates belonging to Halsnøy monastery were organized in this way in 1614, where the size of the tenant units was presumably based on the older *mannsverk* unit. At some point in time, the monastic estate seems to have standardized the land

rent. Almost all farms in the vicinity of the monastery, including Gjerde, paid land rent according to *mannsverk* calculations. This system may have had consequences for the physical settlement structure and for how the land was divided when it was let. The buildings at Gjerde may have at least been physically reorganized during this period.

One theory is that the monastery divided the cultivated fields into sections of equal *mannsverk* value, thereby forming physical lettable units. This idea is primarily supported by the fact that it was the monastery's most central and supposedly oldest farms that paid this type of rent. One important outcome for the elites must have been that previously nontaxable areas worked by slaves were transformed into lettable and taxable ones. The estate owners collected land rent and the king's tax according to specific allocations decided together with the elites.

In Denmark, major estates are mentioned in written sources from the eleventh century in relation to donations to ecclesiastical institutions.<sup>48</sup> For example, in 1085 King Knud IV (r. 1080–86) granted to the bishopric of Lund twenty-two *bol* (Latin *mansus*), the equivalent of as many as eleven full-tax-paying farms, in eleven villages. The archaeologist Morten Søvsvø has presented three new, prominent, machine-stripped archaeological sites near Ribe: at Kalvsund (AD c. 1000), Hviding (AD 1000–1100) and Lustrup (AD 1100–1200).<sup>49</sup> Søvsvø has shown that at these sites, the longhouses disappeared, and villages were established around the churches. Although these changes cannot be proven to be directly related to a tenant-based economy, this seems a likely scenario. Jens Jeppesen has shown that Lisbjerg was a substantial manor in the Viking Age, located higher than and separate from the village in the west.<sup>50</sup> A solid palisade has been found surrounding the buildings (170 × 110 meters), the second largest in Jutland. The larger Jelling palisade surrounds an area six and a half times the size. Such palisades have not yet been found in Norway.

According to Martin Hansson, the aristocracy had already separated themselves from the general population in the eighth century.<sup>51</sup> At Tissø and Järrestad, new halls were built to replace old ones for over five hundred years. This continuity is striking, but even in these locations it is not evident how the tenant system affected the organization of the physical landscape. Developments similar to those in Gjerde are difficult to see. They must, however, be assumed to have taken place when the slave economy was abandoned in the Nordic world.

Similar processes to the one at Gjerde were also employed outside Scandinavia. The archaeologist Annie Renoux has established that the Carolingian palaces (DE *Pfalz*; Latin *palatium*) were recorded as royal centers until the tenth century, at which point their ownership was in many cases transferred. Such palaces form a parallel to both the royal manors and individual estates in Scandinavia. At the same time, towns and nearby castles, both those within and those outside royal control, took on these central functions.<sup>52</sup> A similar situation was found in Norway, where

Bergen became particularly important for western Norway and where a strong bond existed between Erling Skakke and Magnus Erlingsson.

One important characteristic of the major estates in Norway is the presence of large uncultivated areas and associated resources, especially in the form of fisheries. At Gjerde, river fishing was a significant resource. Many major estates had access to large hunting grounds, and uncultivated areas farther inland were used for iron production.

*Heimskringla's* exceptional and well-known description of Sola in Rogaland contains the presumably central principles of estate management in western Norway in the eleventh century. After performing a set day's work, slaves were allowed to cultivate their own fields. Hence, most of them were able to free themselves within one to three years using the surplus from their own fields, and the estate owner then invested the money in new slaves. The freed slaves were still bound to their lord and could be sent to fish herring or take part in other types of labor. Some of them cleared forests and later settled there—in a way still helping their master to succeed.<sup>53</sup> This is a possible scenario for Gjerde too. The manumission process was presumably administered by the monastery. The donation to Halsnøy must have played a significant part in the dismantling of slavery locally in Sunnhordland.

Individual estates in western Europe were not necessarily much larger geographically than those traced in Norway—rather the opposite. I have previously demonstrated that the Herdla estate in Nordhordland (northern Hordaland) may have been ten times larger than Somain in northern France, an estate that Georges Duby used as an example of land usage. In the tenth century, Somain arguably had adjoining estates comprising more than 1,000 hectares, of which a quarter (250) were cultivated fields and meadows (48), and the rest (785) comprised forest and outfields. The main farm, Herdla, was the largest farm in Nordhordland, and the subordinated settlements and estate comprised most of Askøy,<sup>54</sup> an area of roughly 100 square kilometers, which makes it ten times larger than Somain (10,000 hectares compared to 1,000 hectares).

The primary difference between Somain and Herdla was the relative number of infields. Even today, not more than eight percent of Askøy's entire area is cultivated, set against the French example, where twenty-eight percent was already being cultivated in the tenth century. The infields at Somain were kept together and may have been more productive. At Askøy, the fields were dispersed in small clusters, with the exception of the main farm, Herdla, where large moraine deposits created exceptional farming conditions.

Is the fact that Norway has no large continuous arable areas an argument against an estate system, as Jørn Sandnes and many others have argued? In my view, such arguments are based on a lack of spatial perspective. Estate formation was not a centralized phenomenon but rather the opposite. With the exception of the main farms, the estates of western Norway were often

situated on the fringes of settled areas and not always in the most productive parts. It was the sparsely populated Austevoll and the island to the west that made up the Fitjar royal estate, not the more productive farms in the south with their larger arable areas.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, it was the Laksevåg peninsula with its small, marginal farms that made up the estate of Alrekstad around 1100 and earlier, not the more productive farms of Fana. The many small farms on Askøy were attached to Herdla. A similar spatial structure, with a central farm and a peripheral estate, has been discussed by Swedish researchers.<sup>56</sup> Gjerde also had a comparable structure, with the smaller farms located by the forest's edge and along the southern side of the Etne fjord, which were the natural expansion areas for the estate. The expansion may have taken place in the Middle Ages under the direction of Halsnøy monastery. The spatial structure may reflect chronological processes in the landscape, where clearings in peripheral areas may have been an important component in an economy that focused more on landscape utilization. Currently, our knowledge of the age of these later, smaller settlements is limited, and archaeological investigation is necessary in order to further our understanding.

Scandinavian ecclesiastical institutions presumably revitalized older main farms and estates when they took them over in the Middle Ages. In Norway, these institutions owned close to forty percent of all land by the end of the Middle Ages. Research on Munkliv monastery, founded in the 1120s, has shown that in the 1180s, this estate was only a quarter of the size it was in 1427.<sup>57</sup> The estate grew in size as the monks bought and were gifted land, in addition to donations received in return for accepting people into the monastery. The landowning elites established ecclesiastical institutions, and bishoprics were founded by kings. Various groups were involved in the establishment of monasteries, and churches were built with the support of the "upper middle-class" farmers. All this required vast amounts of land, and the creation of new institutions made it possible to reform and change how the donated estates were run. By studying the core of the monastic estates, we can perhaps trace the changes that the manorial systems underwent in an early phase, as has been attempted with Gjerde. The abolishment of slavery is essential in this context. At Gjerde, structural changes may have been made when the land was divided into *mannsverk*, forming the basic units of a new type of tenancy system. This boosted the agricultural economy and generated more infields and outfields, thereby providing a new economic foundation for the elites.

## Notes

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25. NIyR 4, 1–5.
26. “The Saga of the Sons of Harald,” in Hkr vol. 1, ch. 17, p. 296.
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28. Nbl1 3, 576.
29. Iversen, “Eiendom, makt og statsdannelse.”
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40. Iversen, “Eiendom, makt og statsdannelse.”
41. Cf. Robberstad, “Jordeiga til Holsnaklosteret,” 45.
42. NRJ 2, 524; NLR 3, 62–3; NLR 4, 102.
43. Robberstad, “Jordeiga til Holsnaklosteret,” 47.
44. Iversen, “Eiendom, makt og statsdannelse,” 355.
45. L 3.3.3.
46. G 74.



47. L 10.2.3.
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