



The sea as ‘innmark’ or ‘utmark’

The core concept of Norwegian settlement history, the farm, is not well defined. In spite of this shortcoming, the farm is an important analytical unit in a strong Norwegian research tradition, settlement history. Bjørn Myhre has recently discussed some implications of this obscurity related to the challenge of writing the history of farming in Norway (Myhre 2002:102-107 and 120-137). This obscurity is troublesome when comparing Norway with other regions of Northern Europe, where the village has a similar dominating position as a physical, economic, social and analytical concept. It is, however, even more problematic when discussing a general picture of the rural history within the borders of the modern state of Norway.

Within Norway as a region, the ‘farm’ has a variety of connotations. Myhre discusses briefly how the ‘farm’ and the ‘farmer’ were made national symbols in the formative period of the modern Norwegian state, in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This must have added considerably to the difficulties in using the farm as an analytical concept.

In spite of the obscurity, all attempts at defining the farm have some aspects in common. There is always a core (*tun*), the infields (*innmark*), the outlying fields and other natural resources (*utmark*). This complies with Hans Andersson’s first of three alternative interpretations of the concept (Andersson 1998:6). In recognition of the diversity, both chronologically and spatially, the distinction between these three zones becomes a tool for a qualitative scaling of farms. A farm with emphasis on the *utmark* resources is often considered less ‘agricultural’ than one with emphasis on the *innmark*.

The sea, as a resource for communication, fishing, and hunting, is generally considered part of the *utmark*. Viewed in a perspective from the *tun*, the sea and the mountain plateau become alternative, additional resources to the farm, in any respect, of secondary importance.

In his printed, but unpublished book ‘Veid og vær’, A.W. Brøgger offered an overview of the cultural history of the Norwegian coast. His position regarding the age and importance of the settlements of the exposed western coast was that ‘they will lead us to the core of our prehistoric culture’ (Brøgger 1925a:7). He saw the

coast and the sea as a dominating arena and a main theme throughout Norwegian prehistory and history. Brøgger described a diverse, enduring and vital coastal culture. He acknowledged that his information was meagre, but he indicated that the reason for this might be the distorted distribution of archaeological and historical data. In a more general manner, this perspective is repeated in his short work 'Det norske folk i oldtiden' (Brøgger 1925b). Above all, Brøgger argued that diversity was a keyword for the overall picture of the past, particularly the coast. A broad discussion of the empirical basis for settlement studies in coastal regions is provided by I. M. Holm-Olsen (1995).

In her dissertation on social, political and economic development of the Helgeland coast during the period from the birth of Christ until AD 1700, Birgitta Berglund (1995) studied the relation between the Iron Age and medieval centre at Tjøtta and the settlements in the archipelago to the west of this centre. Her conclusion was that the archipelago had the role of special purpose sites, dependent on the centre. Although the economic systems of the Iron Age and the Middle Ages were different, the marginal status of the archipelago was its hallmark.

The commercial fisheries, which became a flourishing economy during the Middle Ages, have been a main theme for historical and archaeological research related to the coast of Norway as well as general medieval history. It has been claimed that this was an economic and social development favoured by the integration of Norwegian economy into the urban European trade network, triggered by the harsh conditions for agriculture along the coast. Many authors have added to this picture of a specialised coastal culture, dependent on trade (summarised by Bratrein and Niemi, among others (Bratrein and Niemi 1994:164). It is also typical that activities like hunting, sealing, whaling and fishing have been considered substitutes for the agricultural production linked to the farm in cases where the farm was located towards the climatic or geological limits of agricultural production, or in cases of continued settlement in spite of a deterioration in conditions.

There is a long series of theoretical issues related to the themes addressed here. The formation and construction of social structures as well as the connections between social structures and landscape seem to me to be the main issues which need to be addressed in a thorough discussion of this complex and interesting matter.

I shall not try to deal with these theoretical questions in this paper, I shall just position myself in a marginal corner of the agrarian landscape and from that perspective make an effort at relating newly discovered sites to the concept of *utmark*.

Some disturbing observations

In 1984, Roger Jørgensen presented an analysis of two Iron Age sites on the northern point of Andøy (Vesterålen). Both of these, Bleik and Toften, were exposed to the open ocean on the part of the coast where the edge of the continental shelf is closest to land. Based on the osteological material (Lahtiperä, University of Bergen), Jørgensen estimated that the people on Bleik drew 1/4 of their nourishment from the sea,

mainly sea mammals and fish. The rest came from cattle and sheep. The neighbouring site came out just the opposite, 1/4 from sheep and cattle and 3/4 from fish and sea mammals. These two contrasting settlements were contemporary and permanent settlements. Bleik fits well into the concept of a marginal farm where they supplemented the products of farming with maritime resources, in an area situated close to the edge of the region where nature permits farming. Toften, on the other hand, fits less obviously into this pattern. In both

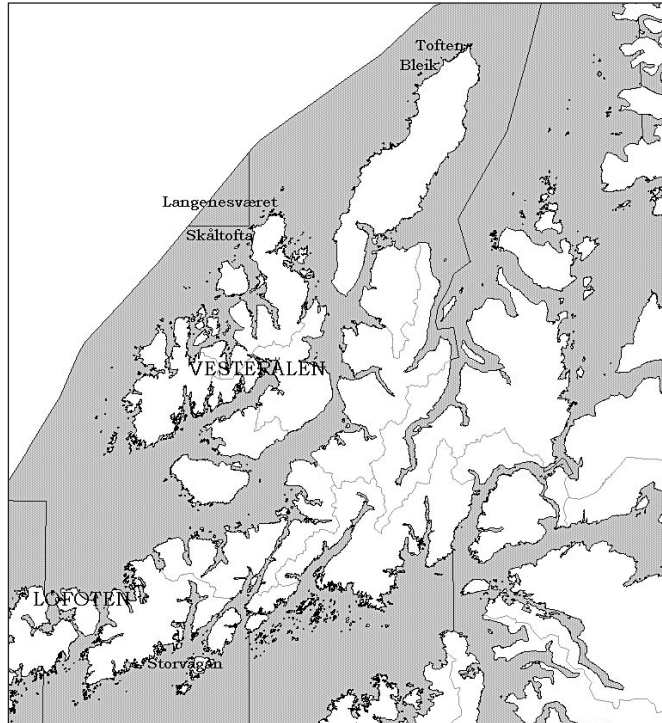


Figure 1. Map of the area

cases, the excavators investigated rich deposits of so-called farm mounds. These are accumulated house ruins and middens resulting from continuous settlement on the same spot. Bleik had a thousand year long settlement period, Toften was only settled for 4-500 years.

Toften and Bleik were neighbouring sites seemingly belonging to the same local community. There are no indications that they were ranked differently within a possible local hierarchical structure.

During 2000 and 2002, I administered investigations on the neighbouring island to the west, Langøy. This fieldwork is part of a Nordic interdisciplinary project funded by NOS-H, called 'Fishing Communities of the North, AD 800-1800'. It is a comparative project running jointly with investigations on the Faeroes and on Iceland (Bertelsen and Nielssen 2003). I will concentrate on some of the observations from subprojects in Vesterålen.

Excavations in the rich deposits of the now deserted fishing village Langenesværet have confirmed the results reported by Simpson *et al.* (2000): that the core of the fishing village has a settlement sequence from the Neolithic period until the twentieth century. However, during the thirteenth century, the settlement was dramatically expanded. There is a cluster of five settlement mounds in Langenesværet, one probably originates from the Stone Age (radiocarbon dates still pending), the four



Figure 2. Photo of Langenesværet

others are medieval or later. Langenesværet was a maritime settlement long before the commercial fisheries flourished in the high Middle Ages. It is perhaps a similar type of settlement to Toften, but with a much longer settlement period.

Davidsen's project is based on a systematic survey of the region surrounding Langenesværet. Some of his results demonstrate a surprising diversity of settlement types and locations, all of them facing the sea (Davidsen forthcoming). I will pay special attention to those we found on the exposed and steep western coast of Langøy. There are 8-10 settlements of Iron Age date and approximately 6 that can be referred to the Middle Ages located on a *ca.* 15 kilometre long part of the coast. None of these have been excavated and the majority of them are only partly preserved.

Skåltofta is one of these sites. There is a longhouse, 39 m long, and 7-8 graves possibly dating from the late Iron Age. In addition, there are vague indications of a boathouse and a landing place for boats (*stø*). Arable land is practically non-existent. The longhouse of Skåltofta is in the absolute upper end of the scale of Norwegian Iron Age houses when it comes to size (Sørum 2002:110). Since size of the longhouse has been the most important parameter for the assessment of status (*ibid.*) of Iron Age farms, Skåltofta is a possible high-status settlement based on the criteria of house size and the number of graves.

At a similar location, 4 kilometres north of Skåltofta, we find a cluster of longhouses of different ages at Vargnesset. The youngest is *ca.* 30 m long and has

a boathouse connected directly to the wall facing towards the sea. 500 m north of Vargneset, there is a site called Skipssanden S. The main structure is a small farm mound. On the top of the mound there are 3-4 small oval house ruins, and there is a group of similar houses immediately to the east of the mound. The indications are that Skipssanden S has a long settlement period, probably from Iron Age until the late Middle Ages. Other sites to the south of Skåltofta add to this variation of types of physical structures.

I find that the indications of diversity demonstrated here represent a phenomenon which can be observed elsewhere on the northern coast of Norway. My ideas for an explanation of this diversity point in the direction of a dynamic social and political situation towards the end of the Iron Age and in the high Middle Ages. The houses and the graves of Skåltofta and Vargneset indicate communities that identified themselves with the Norse Iron Age society even if they had a different way of life.

I mentioned that Bleik and Toften were located as close as possible to the edge of the continental shelf, 'Egga'. Skåltofta, Vargneset and their neighbours, also had Egga within their range of vision, which is quite unique for coastal settlements. It means that their access to maritime resources were optimal year round.

If we shall consider these settlements as farms, they basically consist of *tun* and *utmark*. There were two kinds of *utmark*. On shore, we find the mountain slopes, which probably gave grazing land for sheep and goats, as well as being hunting-grounds with possibilities for collecting different kinds of plant material for food and fire-wood. The sea also offered a wide range of resources. Judged by the bone lists of Bleik and Toften, a number of sea birds and sea mammals were hunted, but cod and other kinds of white fish were of greatest importance.



Figure 3. Photo of Skåltofta

The fisher-farmer

Bratrein (1990) has described in detail the labour and daily life in coastal communities of the Karlsøy municipality north of Tromsø in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One main aspect of this was a distinct division of labour and duties between men and women. The main activity for the men related to the sea, while the women took care of the farm. This kind of society has often been named *fiskerbondesamfunn* (fisher-farmer community) by Norwegian historians. The fisher-farmer was not one person, but at least two persons; a male fisherman and a female farmer. In our perspective, this means that the woman related her life to a space structured along the lines of Andersson 1998 type 1 (*tun*, *innmark* and *utmark*). The landscape of the man had only two main zones (*tun*, *stø* and sea).

This model is well known from the entire coast of North Norway, but the documentation is mainly oral tradition and written records. It has been difficult to project the model backwards back in time because the archaeological data has little to offer in this perspective. My opinion is that there is no reason to assume that the division of labour originates from a period after the introduction of agriculture in the Neolithic period.

Sites like Skåltofta must have been the core of two different landscapes, one terrestrial and one maritime. In the hunter-gatherer economy of the maritime landscape, the distinction between *innmark* and *utmark* has little meaning. It is only relevant for the terrestrial landscape. *Innmark*, in its proper meaning, the fenced fields surrounding the *tun*, would have been practically non-existent. What we have identified are *tun*, *mark* and sea. *Mark* is, in this context, the mountain slope where different resources are distributed in a patchy and overlapping way and it begins just outside the walls of the house. In cases where the sea undoubtedly was the most important part of the landscape as an economical resource, a social arena, a means of communication and as a reference for the worldview, the most important structure of the landscape was perhaps: *tun*, *stø* and sea.

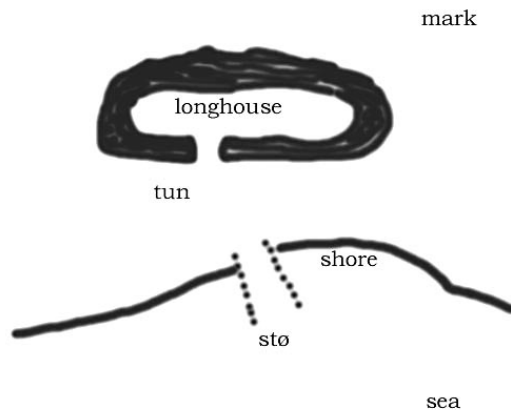


Figure 4. Diagram over the landscape structure

A wider perspective

Harvesting the sea through fishing, whaling, sealing and bird-catching is generally considered the last resort when farming conditions turn out to be marginal or if the conditions deteriorate. The further north, the more important this factor is as an explanation for the existence of a Norse society in the Iron Age or in the Middle Ages.

This conventional perspective has made it possible to refer to the 'Norwegian farm' in spite of all the variations we can observe. Identified differences have not led to the questioning of the Norwegian pre-industrial agrarian society as a rather uniform universe with common standards. Even if the settlements of the northern coast did not fit any definition of a farm, it was often assumed that the intention of the fisher-farmers was to live as 'farm-like' as possible.

When speaking of variations, our focus has been directed towards the contrast between a Norwegian and a Sami society. Our understanding is based upon the Norwegians being linked to the *innmark* and the Sami to the *utmark*. However, even if these links are rather diffuse, they are in a way an important part of the explanation of the unbalanced relationship between the majority and the minority ethnic groups. On the local level, 'bumann' is a synonym for the dominant ethnic group. I mention this because the assumption that focusing on the relation between Norwegians and Sami may have misled us to overlook the fact that there was an interesting economic diversity within the Sami ethnic group at least throughout the Middle Ages and pre-industrial modern time. Farming of a type that in our context must be classified as marginal, had a long tradition as the dominant type of economy. The Sea-Sami agrarian society on the northern Norwegian coast has been investigated by several scholars, most recently by Bratrein (1990) and Hansen (2000).

It is perhaps surprising that we have been less willing to accept the idea of diversity within the Norse ethnic group. Thorleif Sjøvold (1962) argued that Norse farms were restricted to the zone south of the climatic border for the cultivation of barley during the Iron Age, and his viewpoints have been influential. This is a consequence of an idea of a uniform Iron Age society, based on the farm as a basic element. In spite of a long series of observations that indicated Norse settlement far north of the climatic border (a little to the south of Tromsø), this idea is still considered valid. Exceptions have generally been explained as special settlements made possible by a redistribution economy (cf. Berglund 1995).

My main argument here is that Toften, Vargnesset, and Skåltofta call for an understanding of the Norse society and culture which is not linked to the agricultural resources on a one-to-one basis.

This also means that the transition from subsistence economy to market economy had a different character on this coast to that described above, where farmers gave up the fields and went winter fishing instead. It seems to me that the likely development in the case of the Langenes region was that the population moved to a smaller number of harbours, where it was possible to gain access to the fishing grounds even in rough

weather. This situation became more predominant in the Middle Ages. The harbour, which must have been the most attractive resource for the location of the settlement, became even more important than in the Iron Age.

Are these observations important? Yes, I think so, mainly because they invite us to consider the diversity more carefully than we have done until now. Some of the Norse settlements of Andøy and Langenes cannot be considered marginal examples of the Norwegian type of farm, because *utmark* is a dominant factor in relation to an *innmark* that is difficult to identify. It is perhaps more appropriate to consider them optimal settlements, belonging to a tradition originating in the Mesolithic period with a continuation until the major restructuring of the northern coastal region in the Middle Ages, a time when the stockfish trade facilitated a massive European cultural influence that changed the societies profoundly.

Specialised fishing villages based on winter cod fisheries off the coast and stock fish production are well known from the Middle Ages until modern times. Few of them have been excavated and none of them have proved to be older than the thirteenth century. This fits well with the predominant view among historians, that fishing villages were made possible by means of the market economy (Simonsen 1980, Bratrein and Niemi 1994). The conventional explanation offered has been that farmers along the coast tended to give up marginal farming, or perhaps invest less labour in farming, when the abundant cod could be traded for cereals. I will not argue that this was not a part of the picture, but the lesson learnt from Bleik, Toften, Vargnesset, Skåltofta, Langenesværet and other sites, is that the main story may have been that the emergence of commercial fisheries in the Middle Ages motivated households which mainly lived from fishing, sea mammal hunting and other marine resources to give up a scattered (but sedentary) settlement pattern and establish clusters (fishing villages). These people did have the technology and the know-how; they had only to adjust their social organisation somewhat. It is also a part of the history that the fishing villages attracted newcomers to the maritime way of life.

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