AN ISLAND IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ISLAND

ON CULT, LAWS AND AUTHORITY IN VIKING AGE GOTLAND

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The present-day small village of Roma on Gotland in the Baltic Sea was the physical and symbolic centre of the island in the Iron Age and into Medieval times (Fig. 1). The Cistercian monastery and the meeting place of the island's assembly, the *all-thing*, two well-known features of medieval Roma, have often been taken as indications of an egalitarian and non-stratified society on Gotland during the Viking Age and Middle Ages. It is here proposed, however, that an older Iron Age cult site at Roma eventually came under the control of a chieftain or major landowner who introduced Christianity, founded a monastery and inaugurated the *thing* in Roma in Viking or early medieval times, just as his equals did elsewhere in Scandinavia. While the later medieval *thing* was probably located near the monastery, an alternative site is suggested for the older *all-thing*.

THE *ALL-THING* OF GOTLAND

In Medieval times (i.e. from c. 1100 onwards in local terms) Gotland was organised into 20 *thing* districts. These legal entities are mentioned in the *Guta Lagh* (Gotlandic Law) and *Guta Saga* (printed edition Gannholm 1984), which were written down at the beginning of the 13th century (but may contain older strata, see Kyhlberg 1991). It is not certain whether the *things* were prehistoric or belonged to an early medieval re-organisation of the island (Steffen 1943, pp. 3 ff, 48 f; Hyenstrand 1989, pp. 15f , 108 ff; Rönnby 1995, p. 103), but they
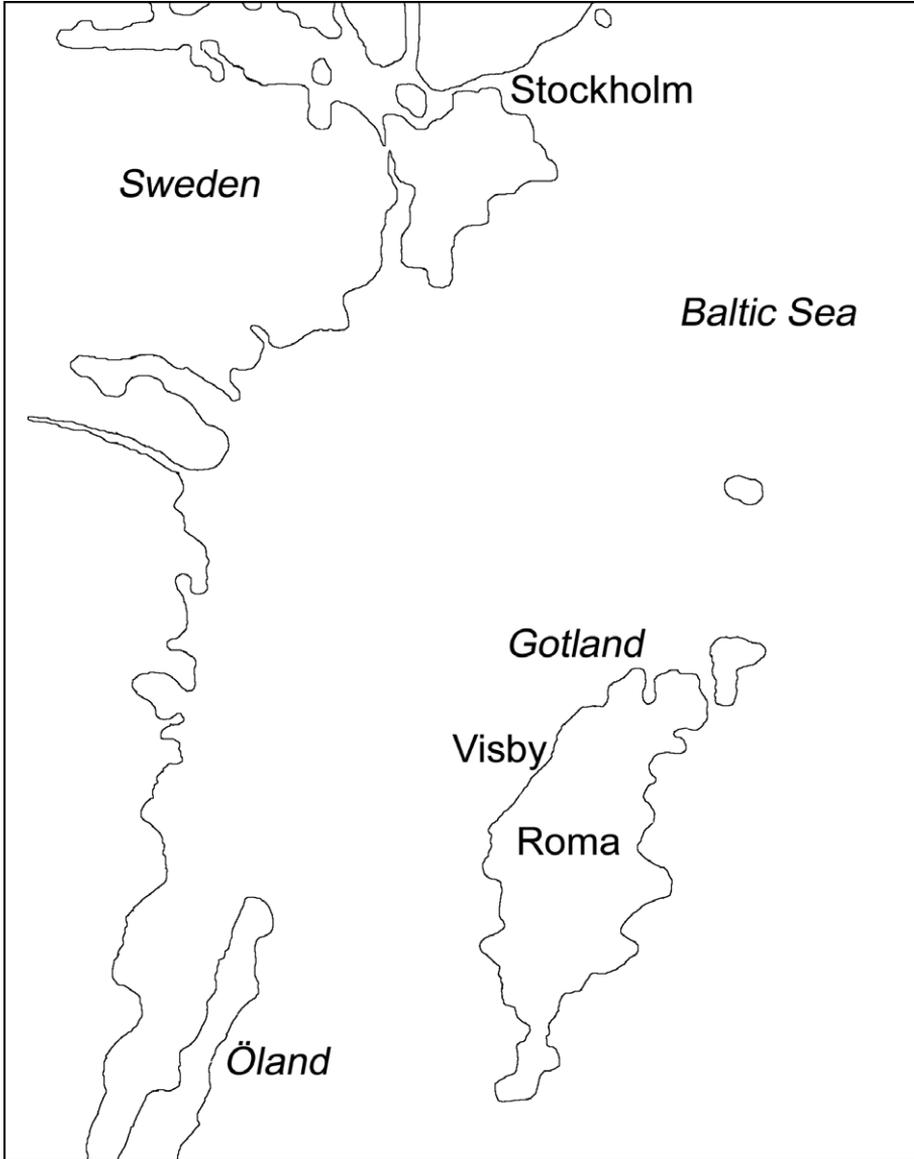
Figure 1. The position of the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, and the village and monastery of Roma (drawing by the author).

served as means of organizing both societal relations and the physical space. *Lag* means 'law', but was also used for the community of people who lived by a given law, and for the physical area in which this community lived (Gurevich 1985, p. 157; Brink 2002, p. 99). As the judicial entities in that sense also constituted social and territorial boundaries, they thus defined much of the human

movement that took place within the local society

The *all-thing* of Gotland, the island's central assembly and supreme legal instance, is of particular interest since it has been suggested (notably by Yrwing 1940, 1978) that its existence points to an egalitarian society of free farmers on Gotland during the Viking Age and Middle Ages. This picture of the internal organisation of the island has been questioned on several occasions (e.g. Carlsson 1983; Hyenstrand 1989; Rönnby 1995), but it is still common and is continuously being communicated to the public. The existence of a central assembly on the island is mentioned in the *Guta Lagh* and *Guta Saga* (e.g. GL §31, GS §9), and it is also likely by analogy with the medieval organization of other Scandinavian-dominated areas such as Iceland. The image of Gotland as an egalitarian farming and trading society nevertheless needs to be called into question once more.

The area of Roma in the centre of the island was first named as the site of the Gotlandic *all-thing* assemblies in the 1401 translation of the *Guta Lagh* into German: "gutnaldhing das ist czu Rume" (Pernler 1977, p. 61; Yrwing 1978, p. 80), while according to taxation records for 1699, some of the land around the monastery of Roma may have belonged to several *things* (Östergren 1990, 2004) (Fig. 2). That this was the place where the Medieval *all-thing* gathered might also be indicated by the name of the Cistercian monastery founded there in 1164, *Sancta Marie de Guthnalia*, as suggested by Lindström (1895). In his interpretation, *Guthnalia* could be a Latinized form of **gutnalþing*, the *all-thing* of the Gutar (Gotlanders), so that the name of the monastery was derived from the *all-thing* itself, which may indeed have initiated the foundation of the monastery (Lindström 1895, p. 170 ff). This suggestion and interpretation could imply that the *all-thing* took an active interest in the introduction of Christianity to Gotland, and thus may bear witness to the democratic character of early medieval Gotlandic society. The endowment of land for the monastery could have been made out of land held in common by the Gotlanders and thus controlled by the *all-thing* (Östergren 2004, p. 44).

It should be remembered, however, that Christianization and the foundation of churches and monasteries were in all other cases initiated and dominated by individuals, normally major landowners or petty kings. The interpretation is thus based on a pre-supposed difference between Gotland and the rest of Scandinavia, namely the existence of a particularly egalitarian society on Gotland. Since this hypothesis or presupposition relies to an extent on the fact that it is used to explain, we are here dealing with a classic example of a circular argument. Luckily, archaeology can provide some more input that should be taken into consideration when discussing this matter.
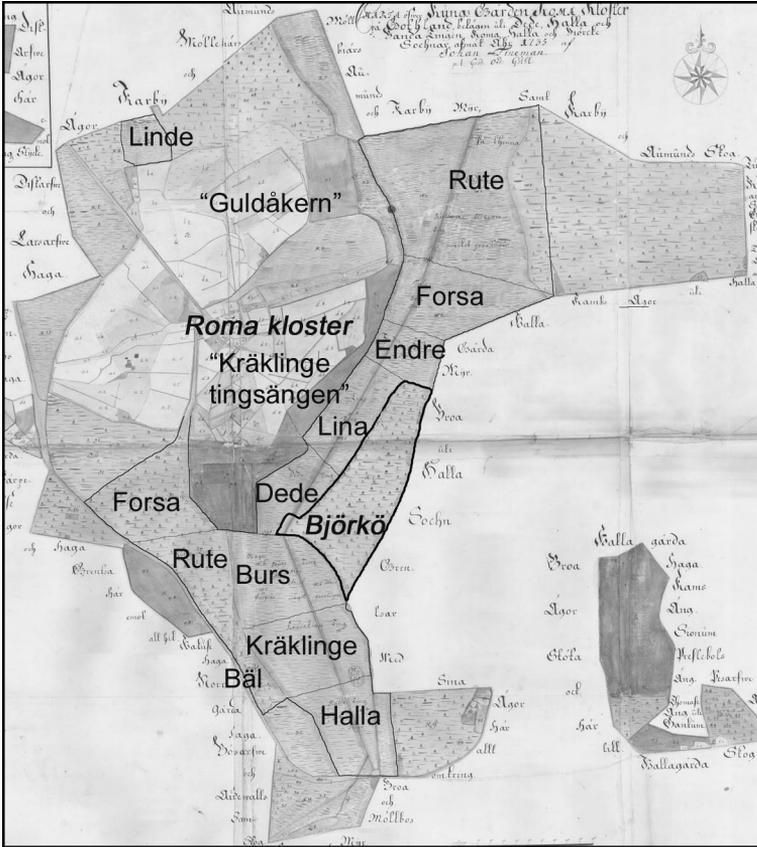
Figure 2. The area around Roma Monastery on the 1699 taxation map. The plots with thing-names are here marked out as noted on the map; *Guldåkern* and *Kräklinge tingsängen* were added using information in Östergren 2004; *Björkö* was marked out using information in Generalstabskartan 1890 (additions made by the author).

GULDÅKERN AND KRÄKLINGE TINGSÄNG

The 1699 taxation map shows several plots of land with names referring to *things* surrounding the monastery of Roma (Fig. 4), and Östergren suggests that this was where the representatives attending the *thing* slept and kept their animals during the meetings. Thus the area around the Roma monastery may have been land held in common, where the different things held rights over certain areas. In order to be at the centre of these dwelling places, the *all-thing* itself must have assembled within the area of the later monastery (Östergren 1990, 2004, p. 40 ff).

About 600 m northeast of the monastery lies the *Guldåkern* (the 'Golden Field', named after three *solidi* coins found there in 1848, Fig. 2). This area, c.

200 x 300 m in size, was investigated with metal detectors in 1990 and was interpreted as a Viking Age trading place on the basis of finds of silver fragments, silver coins and weights, most of the material being from the 10th century AD. The adjacent *Kräklinge tingsängen* (meadow of the Kräklinge *thing*) was investigated on the same occasion and yielded silver coins, melted silver and bronze, fragments of bronze jewellery and a casting cone, indicating metalworking at the site, and was considered to be a farmstead from the Vendel or Viking period (Östergren 1992, p. 42 f). Roman *denarii* were found at both sites, indicating that they were connected in terms of their use during the period prior to the Vendel and Viking ages (all the Roman coins probably ended up there during the fourth century AD). Unfortunately, the area was much disturbed during the Second World War and it is thus difficult to say exactly how and where the artefacts were initially deposited.

Guldåkern, *Kräklinge tingsängen*, and the other plots with *thing* names, are all interesting sites, but neither has been suggested as the actual location of the *thing* itself. The *thing* was not the scene of either trade or metalworking, nor did people live there. It has been suggested that the Vendel and Viking Age material found on *Guldåkern* and *Kräklinge tingsängen* results from the fines and fees paid and exchanged during negotiations at the *thing* (Domeij 2000, p. 36 f). If this is so, it would be the most tangible proof so far for a pre-medieval *thing* actually having been located in the area.

The central location of the monastery within the semi-circle of properties named after *things* may be a result of the monastery having been founded on land held in common, and would thus indicate that this land was given to the Cistercians by the *things* in 1164. But the distribution of these properties may just as well result from their being *secondary to the monastery*, and demonstrate that the monastery is the older feature and the localizing factor.

THE GUTNAL ÞING

The word *Gutnalia* in the name of the Cistercian monastery at Roma first appeared in written sources in the 13th century and was subsequently used on the seals of the monastery and its abbot (Ortved 1933, p. 305), so that the place-names *Roma* and *Gutnalia* are used interchangeably in the documents (Lindström 1895, p. 171; Ortved 1933, p. 304 f). It has been suggested that this (Latinized) name of the monastery refers to the *all-thing*. But why would the monastery take its name from an administrative assembly? And if the *thing* was indeed so important, why is the place not named 'Allthingia'? One significant point is that the *Guta Saga* does not actually read *gutna alltþing*, but

gutnal þing (e.g. GS §9), as pointed out by Hjalmar Lindroth (1915) while discussing the linguistic basis of the name *Gutnalia*. He concluded that *Gutnal* is an independent place-name, *Gutna al* (*al* of the Gotlanders) (Lindroth 1915, p. 66 f). Most Cistercian monasteries and churches were dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and thus the epithet "…de Gutnalia" served to distinguish the monastery of Roma from its sister institutions. The name *Gutnalia* itself, though, must have been derived from a place-name containing the element -*al*.

A place denoted by *al* should be understood as a 'protected area', but there is also a connection between *al* and assembly places (Vikstrand 2001, p. 192 ff). Most *al* names denote natural features, but a few may have a cultic or sacral meaning: *Götala*, *Gutnal*, *Fröjel*, *Alsike* and a few others. These names derive from the Germanic *alh-*, 'protection' (Brink 1992, p. 111 ff). The word has connotations such as 'defended', 'shielded', 'consecrated' and 'sanctified'. Furthermore, *al* is apparently found where there was a building of great social distinction (ibid, p. 116). In German non-religious texts the word was used in the sense of 'house', 'protection', 'a fenced, protected area' or 'a legally protected place' (settlement) (Schmidt-Wiegand 1967, 1989). It is known through texts such as a runic inscription in Oklunda that cultic places were under some kind of legal protection (see below), and also from passages in the *Guta Lagh* and *Guta Saga* (GL §13, GS §11). The notion is also found in a Christian context, in the idea that the sanctity of churches should not be violated.

The *gutn(a)* part of *Gutnalia* ties the name and the place to the Gotlandic people. In that sense the interpretation of a pre-Christian cultic *al*-place of importance to the Gotlanders does not disagree with the notion of the name being connected with the *all-thing*. Cults and legal/regal authority may have been even more intertwined in earlier times than later during the Medieval period. The difference is that in one case, Latinized *Gutnalia* would refer to *al*, the physical '(cult-? central-? *thing*-?) place of the Gutar', perhaps connected with a prominent house or hall. In the other case, the name *Gutnalia* would refer to *all* as in the *all-thing* ('-*thing*' simply being omitted from the name) and would imply that the *thing* wanted to found a Christian monastery, and had the authority to do so. I will proceed to argue that the first explanation is the more likely one.

THE SETTING OF THE *ALL-THING*

The exact locations of ancient *thing* assemblies are rarely known, but in several cases there is at least some information deriving from historical sources, folk tradition or place-names. Such assemblies were often thought to have been

held at prehistoric monuments such as great mounds, or 'judge's rings' (Sw. *domarring*, an Iron Age grave type consisting of a circle of boulders or vertical stones). But more frequently the meeting places are hard to identify, and it is generally difficult to determine the age of a *thing* site or to locate it by archaeological means (cf. Sanmark 2004). Prehistoric assembly places are generally found in areas with a high concentration of rune-stones and prehistoric graves, often on the "periphery" of a settled area. Also, assembly places were often moved on one or more occasions in the later Middle Ages (although, as far as is known, never more than 10 km) to comply with new situations or demands on accessibility, but the old locations apparently influenced the allocation of later assembly places up until late historical times (Sanmark 2008, p. 15). *Thing* sites were often not situated near settlements, but rather at communication nodes in the landscape (Vikstrand 2001, p. 412; cf. Wilson 1994, p. 67). The morphology of *thing* sites also shows much variation: open places, mounds, or a rectangular stone-setting such as Arkil's *thing* site in Uppland (Nordén 1938; Lönnroth 1982). The excavated remains of Þingnes in Iceland revealed a concentric circular structure surrounded by farmhouses (Ólafsson 1987, p. 343 ff).

The physical assembly place has thus often been connected with prehistoric monuments and manifest remnants such as procession roads, both prehistoric and Medieval. The majestic *Anundshög* [Anund's mound] in Middle Sweden is one well-known example where a great mound, a procession road flanked by large stones, and several monumental prehistoric graves (stone ships) are combined, making a profound impression on the visitor even today. There is no real proof, however, that these "*thing*" mounds were indeed once settings for prehistoric assemblies. That may well be an invention of later times, connecting the impressive monuments with the forefathers and people of the past. It is simply difficult to tell which one was the localizing factor: the *thing* site for the monument, or the monument for the idea of how a *thing* was staged? The known *thing* sites suggest there was in reality a considerable amount of morphological variation.

ISLANDS AS SETTINGS FOR *THINGS*

There are similar traditions attached to *thing* and assembly places in northern Britain and in Scandinavia, with mounds or stone circles being identified as gathering places (Driscoll 2004). On Islay, off the west coast of Scotland, an important medieval meeting place was situated on a small island in a lake (*Eilean na Comhairle*, 'the council isle', in *loch* Finlaggan). During the negoti-

Figure 3. The Law Ting Holm in Loch Tingwall, Shetland. Photo: R.M.M. Crawford (used with permission).

ations the lord and his attendants would live on a larger island nearby, just off the shore, in a royal complex that included a monastery (Caldwell 2003). On Shetland, the Law Ting Holm in the lake of Tingwall was a small island close to the shore which was used for assemblies in the Norse (Viking/Medieval) period (Fig. 3). The most important medieval church of Shetland was on the shore, and both Eilean na Comhairle and Law Ting Holm were connected to the shore by a causeway.

Islands, an islet or *holm* as it may have been, have so far not been much discussed as possible *thing* sites in a Scandinavian context. Þingnes in Iceland was apparently situated on a promontory or peninsula (also reflected in its name), but I have found no discussion on 'island' settings as such. Still, bearing in mind the similarities between the assembly place traditions of the (Norse-dominated) British Isles and Scandinavia in other respects, the suggestion can be put forward that islets or small peninsulas should be evaluated in a new light in the search for the elusive Scandinavian *thing* sites of the Late Iron Age (Viking Age) and early medieval times.

Before and during the Iron Age the whole area of present-day Roma was in the nature of a promontory, surrounded partly by wetlands and partly by open water (Fig. 4), and it was probably possible to reach the Roma area by boat all the way from both coasts. At the south end of the complex of waterways surrounding Roma is the narrowest point, a small strait, with Gotland's largest
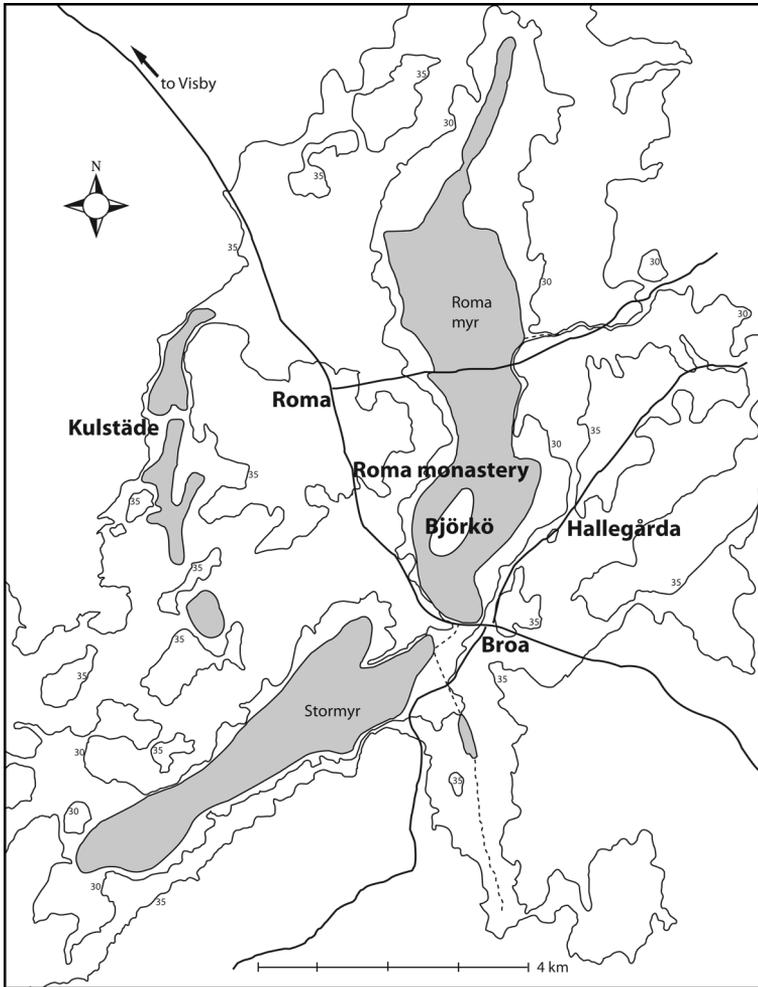
Figure 4. The area around Roma with some places mentioned in the text. The 30- and 35-metre contours and the wetlands as they may have looked before modern ditching are marked. Drawn by the author after the present topographical map with additions from Generalstabskartan 1890, Moberg 1938 and FMIS (the digital information system of the Swedish National Heritage Board).

Iron Age burial ground (Broa, in the parish of Halla) and the Viking or Medieval fortifications of Hallegårda just across the water. To the northwest and southeast the land is much higher, and the area of Roma thus lay 'sunk' between the two halves of Gotland. The peninsula of Roma was like an 'island in the middle of the island' which had to be passed through no matter whether one was travelling in a north-south or east-west direction, on land or by boat. Roma parish church, a prominent three-aisled hall church erected in the mid-

13th century, is situated on a high point north of the monastery and by a cross-roads. It was preceded by a stone church from the 12th century (which was already there when the monastery was founded), which in its turn was perhaps preceded by a wooden church.

Broa ('the bridge') about 1.5 km southwest of the Roma monastery on the other side of the bog, is the largest burial ground on Gotland and one of the best sources of material of a typical high-status character. The cemetery was in use from the Roman Iron Age to the Viking period, and the artefacts found include numerous weapons and four prestigious helmets from the Vendel period as well as an equestrian grave from the early Viking period. In particular the helmets indicate connections with high-status graves outside Gotland, such as those of Vendel in Central Sweden or the British Sutton Hoo ship burial. This distinguishes the Broa area from the other large centres and burial grounds on northern and southern Gotland. The area stretches away on both sides of the road southeast of the present bridge, and along the road running north to Halla and Hallegårda (Fig. 4). The latter is a fortification of concentric circular walls with a stone building inside, probably of late Viking or early Medieval origin and has been interpreted as a centre inhabited by a local chieftain (Broberg *et al.* 1990). This complex is situated south and southeast of the Roma monastery, on the other side of the wetland.

There was once a small island or islet, Björkö, in the northeast mouth of the strait, a feature which is still visible on late 19th-century maps drawn before the draining of the bog began. The name of the island incites curiosity, since Björkö is also the present name of the famous Viking Age town of Birka in Lake Mälaren. In medieval Scandinavia the word Birka (Bjärka, Björkö) denoted a certain type of legislation, *Bjärköarätt* (the early legislation of many early towns), and more generally 'special jurisdiction' (KHL, p. 656, entry *Bjärköarätt*). This may have nothing to do with the small island near Roma, but the island is still interesting in its own right. Considering the similar traditions surrounding *thing* and other assembly places in northern Britain and in Scandinavia, one may wonder if we are not looking here at a Scandinavian parallel to the islands in the Finlaggan and Tingwall lakes.

The British examples of island *thing* sites, with churches, manors and accommodations for the attending parties on the shore, evoke the question of whether the semicircle of properties bearing the names of *things* to be found around the Roma monastery was in fact not relating to the *waterfront* at the time, and that they faced the islet of Björkö rather than the monastery. It may indeed be suggested that, at least in prehistoric and early Medieval times, the assemblies may have been held on Björkö rather than in an area now beneath

the monastery ruins or in any of the adjacent meadows. The Broa cemetery and perhaps also the Hallegårda fortifications behind the island would have been clearly visible from the shore, offering a view of the centre of power and the resting place of the great forefathers as a background.

Unfortunately there is nothing left to prove that Björkö was an assembly place, since the islet itself has been almost totally destroyed through draining and digging in the bog during the past decade. There are now dams where the island was until the beginning of the last century. This hypothesis will thus remain unconfirmed unless new evidence is uncovered to prove it. This setting for the assembly place makes far more sense, however, and conforms better to other historically known settings such as Þingnes or Law Thing Holm than does the previously proposed location on the site later taken over by the monastery.

THE STAGING OF THE *THING*

According to written sources such as the Icelandic Sagas, negotiations at a *thing* took place within a demarcated area and most of the agents attached to the assembly had to remain outside. The law-court was probably marked out with *vébond*, strings or ropes tied between rods stuck into the ground, or running through iron rings attached to the rods, as seems to have been the case at the recently excavated site of *Ullevi* in central Sweden (Blomkvist & Jackson 1999, p. 21; Vikstrand 2001, p. 332; Brink 2002, p. 90; *Svenska Dagbladet* June 22 2008, p. 24 f). The word *vébond* is connected to the concept of *vi*, appearing as a place-name in itself or as part of one (as in Ullevi, meaning 'the Vi of the god Ull'). 'Vi' denotes a protected area where there was a right of asylum (Vikstrand 2001, p. 323 ff), and has been interpreted as meeting place consecrated to the supernatural powers, an arena for cult and common ritual under divine protection (ibid, p. 332). 'Vi' often appears in pairs with the toponym *lund* [grove], which denotes the cultplace proper, the sacrificial grove (a famous Lunda excavated recently outside Strängnäs in central Sweden, yielded spectacular finds of gold figurines and more than 4 kilogrammes of burnt and crushed human bones; see Andersson 2003, 2004). The locations for meetings of a *thing* thus seem to have been very complex places, including several nodes and combining legal actions with various cult and ritual elements.

Concepts of peace and inside/outside were also connected with the assembly place and with the ideology of the *thing*, as also with the *vi*. Inside the *vébond* sphere there was *friðr* ('peace'), and outside there was *úfriðr* ('unpeace') (Blomkvist & Jackson 1999, p. 21 f). This was manifested through the

demarcation of an area. The concept was not exclusive to the *thing*, but an individual could also legally seek asylum and protection by drawing a 'circle of peace' for himself. This is described in the medieval Gotlandic *Guta Lagh* (GL §13), but was probably also a legal feature in other parts of Scandinavia much earlier than the 13th century. Such an event is described in a 9th-century runic inscription in Oklunda (Sweden) (Lönnqvist & Widmark 1997, p. 151; Gustavson 2003, p. 187), where one Gunnar states that he has fled to this *vi,* inside the circle of peace. This runic inscription may be regarded as a legal document (Brink 2002, p. 96) but it may also have had a magical meaning, since the carving is shaped like a tied bond (Lönnqvist & Widmark 1997, p. 156 f).

The *vébond* strings served a double purpose: they created a restricted area where peace had to be kept, and they divided the lawmen from the ordinary delegates during the meeting. The apparent tension between these two groups, as reflected in the Icelandic law compilation *Grágás*, *Egils saga Skallagrimsónar*, and *Viga-Glúms saga*, for example (Holmgren 1929, pp. 22, 25 ff), may have been due to the innate tension between those who enforced the law and *siðr* (old custom) and those who had to accept their judgements. Respect for the law-courts was just as fundamental as it is today, and infringement of it was punishable by exile in Iceland (ibid, p. 25). Runes on a large 9th-century ring from Forsa in northern Sweden (interpreted as an oath ring for use at the *thing*) describe what will happen to the one who fails to respect the law-courts and the asylum granted by the *vi*. This involved fines and the suspension of property rights (Ruthström 1990; Brink 2002, p. 97 f; cf. Myrberg 2008, p. 146).

Rings were obviously important within the context of the *thing*, as indicated by the phrase 'bringing something *a þing ok a ring* [to the *thing* and to the ring]' which is found in medieval laws (Holmgren 1929, p. 22 ff; Blomkvist & Jackson 1999, p. 21). This may be a reference to an oath ring, kept in the temple and brought out by the cult leader during legal negotiations (cf. Habbe 2005, p. 134 f), such as the Forsa ring, or to the numerous smaller rings found on Ullevi and originally probably attached to poles around the sacred area. "All is bound in rings" the *Guta Saga* states solemnly, probably giving some kind of authentication to the text. References to *band*, *ring* and *baugr* (ring) in the sagas may have a religious and/or judicial significance (Blomkvist & Jackson 1999, p. 20 ff), and the tying of knots and giving away of rings are accordingly frequent themes in the mythology and sagas as metaphors for the giving of promises or establishment of relations.

The staging, ritual and ideology of the prehistoric or early medieval *thing* thus seem to be much concerned with concepts of peace, inside/outside and

rings, as well as with social reproduction, the community and the maintenance of old customs, *siðr*. Ritual meals and communal feasting are thought to have been part of the *thing* meetings and of the associated cultic activity (e.g. the *sjudning*, ritual meals consumed with one's *supnautar*, 'cooking brothers', described in the *Guta Saga* (GS §5; cf. Yrwing 1951, p. 13; 1978, p. 82). The *thing* may have represented a social ideology of equality in a time that otherwise demonstrated great social differences. As a parallel, one may look at Iceland, where the early laws and sagas helped to create and maintain a mythology and ideal of an equal society which was not the real situation even in the earliest *landnám* period (Rafnsson 1974, p. 187 f; Durrenberger 1992; Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, p. 149; Smith 1995).

GUTNAL, THE MONASTERY, AND THE *ALL-THING* OF ROMA

It is easy to imagine that the low-lying promontory surrounded by lakes and bogs in the middle of the island held a particular fascination for the people of Gotland, especially at a time when waterfronts and bogs were of central importance for cultic and votive activities, as seems to have been the case for example at Tuna, southwest of Roma, and in the *Roma* mire itself. Gold and wild boar tusks were found in the Roma mire during drainage work in the 1930s (SHM 17815, SHM 32811). Tuna has yielded a number of spectacular finds, such as Roman coins, gold bracteates and a mass of golden rings, mostly belonging to the Migration period, c. 400–550 AD (Hildeberg 1999, p. 24), although the Roman *denarii* point to use of the site having begun around AD 300 (Roman Iron Age).

   If the promontory was indeed an Iron Age *al* place, this would have sustained its function as a central meeting place for many centuries. But the archaeological and historical evidence also demonstrates the influence of local chieftains, as visible in matters ranging from burials and the deposition of Iron Age valuables in these to the building of private churches and the granting of land for a monastery. Nobody explicitly referred to as a 'chieftain' can be detected in the written documents concerned with the founding of the monastery, but the initiative and endowment for all the other Swedish monasteries is known to have come from a major landowner or petty king with ambitions. The role of a bishop in the process may have been decisive in some cases (Nyberg 2000, p. 211 f), but this usually resulted from the bishops' close family connections with the nobility. The building of churches and monasteries was a means by which the elite could act like continental kings and associate them-

selves with the expanding Church, and thus legitimize their claims to power and retain their ideological influence within society (cf. Nyberg 2000, p. 81 ff; Tagesson 2002, p. 237).

Such elite figures or chieftains are detectable in the Gotlandic archaeological record, and are also mentioned in the *Guta Saga*, being described as rich landowners or lawmen, as being 'wise', or as acting as emissaries abroad. A few kilometres northwest of Roma one still finds Akebäck and Kulstäde (Fig. 4), where, according to the *Guta Saga* (§10), the first church on the island was built by a private patron, probably in the 11th century. This patron, Botair, actually had two churches built, since the people of the island burned the first one down, and tried to burn the second one as well. Botair was sufficiently influential, however, to build his churches in two prominent places: one (Kulstäde) within a few kilometres of the *Gutnal*, and the other at *Vi* (often interpreted as the present-day Visby). The prominence and significance of vi places has been pointed out above. It may be that Botair's self-confidence was partly based on the fact that he was the son-in-law of Likair the Wise, a man who according to the *Guta Saga* "reth mest um than tima" (ruled/advised most in that time) (GS §11). Likair was thus either a petty king or the island's highest legal authority, and Botair must accordingly have been considered a mighty person himself to conclude such a good marriage. Apparently he controlled land very close to the *Gutnal*, most likely through inheritance, and it was there that he built his first church.

The period of Botair, and of the Iron Age-medieval centre of Broa-Hallegårda, is close to the time when the monastery in Roma was established. That is, to the time when the *all-thing* is thought to have been in command of the land in the Roma area. Yet close to the monastery there was land in one direction that was controlled by one of the most influential (and probably wealthiest) men on the island (Botair), and in another direction there was the (now anonymous) owner of the fortified Hallegårda. 'Botair' may be only an imaginary figure in the saga, but the Hallegårda-Broa complex bears archaeological witness to the fact that such persons must have existed there at the time. At least the early 13th-century author of the *Guta Saga* takes their existence for granted. The *thing* as an institution has been regarded as having been dominated by small farmers, so that it remained independent of the great landowners, since this is the picture inferred from the medieval laws (Brink 1998, p. 300; Vikstrand 2001, p. 412). Again, archaeology gives us a different picture, in particular regarding the Viking period. Jarlabanke, a major landowner in central Sweden, inaugurated a *thing* site in the 11th century, as did Arkil and his brothers some generations earlier to commemorate their father

Ulf, also a great landowner (Nordén 1938; Lönnroth 1982; U 212, 225, 226). The Þingnes assembly place, Iceland's first, was founded around 900 AD by the 'supreme chieftain', the *Allsherjargodi*, next to his house (Ólafsson 1987). Thus archaeology shows us that an upper class of landowners took an active part in developing the *thing* as an institution and influenced its location.

Is it plausible that the Gotland *all-thing* could actually have owned land and been able to dispose of it as it wished? And if it did – why would the *all-thing* give away as an endowment for a monastery the very spot that was most central to its own activities – the assembly place itself? It appears more likely that the endowment for the monastery was made by an individual great landowner or chieftain in the area. To locate it in a setting which alluded to older ritual behaviour and the great ancestors would comply better with what we know about the nature of prehistoric power and the *thing* ideology. This was the way of behaving and of displaying individual power in other areas of Scandinavia. Likewise, the inauguration of a *thing* assembly place may well have been influenced by individual members of the elite class who had external connections and internal ambitions for power.

The *Guta Saga* and *Guta Lagh* regulate in detail other important matters of concern to the community. The Christianization of the island, the first churches and their relation to the Church and the bishop are all mentioned, but not the foundation of the monastery, which must have happened as part of the same process (and at about the same time). This suggests that the latter was not a matter of common concern. The name *Gutnalia* does not, as was suggested in the past, tell us that the monastery was founded by the *all-thing*, but that it was once a sacred place of social distinction: the *Al* of Gotland.

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U + nr = nr in UR

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATA: Antiquarian-Topographical Archive (ATA), Stockholm.

DGK: Danmarks gamle købstadslovgivning. Erik Kroman 1951.

Dipl. Dal.: *Diplomatarium Dalecarlicum: urkunder rörande landskapet Dalarne.* Samlade och utgifne av C.G. Kröningssvärd & J. Lidén. Stockholm 1842–1853.

Dnr: Registration number.

DR+nr: Runic inscription in L. Jacobsen & E Moltke (eds.). *Danmarks runeindskrifter.* København 1941–42.

DS: Diplomatarium Suecanum. Utgivet af J. G. Liljegren m fl. 1828–. Stockholm

G+nr: Runic inscription in E. Brate och E. Wessén (eds.). *Gotlands runinskrifter.* Stockholm 1962.

GS: Guta Saga (The Gotlandic Saga), published in Gannholm, T. 1984. *Guta Lagh med Gutasagan.* Stånga

GL: Guta Lagh (The Gotlandic law), published in Gannholm, T. 1984. *Guta Lagh med Gutasagan.* Stånga

KHL: Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid. Malmö.

KMK: Kungl. Myntkabinettet (The Royal Coin Cabinet), Stockholm.

NE: Nationalencyklopedin. Höganäs 1993.

O.N.: Old Norse

RAp: Riksarkivet pergamentbrev. National Archive of Sweden, parchment letter.

RApp: Riksarkivet pappersbrev. National Archive of Sweden, letter.

RAÄ: The Swedish National Heritage Board

RAÄ+nr: Site nr in the Ancient monuments survey of the Swedish National Heritage Board

SD: Svenskt Diplomatarium från och med år 1401 (täcker åren 1401–1420). Utg. Av Riksarkivet och Kungl. Vitterhets- Historie- och Antikvitetesakademien. Stockholm 1875–1904.

SHM: Statens Historiska Museum (The Museum of National Antiquities), Stockholm.

SML Nä: Sveriges Mynthistoria Landskapsinventeringen. Part 5, Närke. M. Golabiewski Lannby 1990. The Royal Coin Cabinet and the Numismatic Institute, Stockholm.

SRI: Sveriges runinskrifter. Utg. av Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien 1–. 1900 ff. Stockholm.

SSAp: Stockholms stadsarkiv pergamentbrev. Municipal archive of Stockholm parchment letter.

Sö+nr: Runic inscription in E. Brate and E. Wessén, (eds.). *Södermanlands runinskrifter*. Stockholm 1924–36.

U+nr: Runic inscription in E. Wessén and S. B. F. Jansson, (eds.). *Upplands runinskrifter*. Stockholm 1940–58.

VG+nr: Runic inscription in H. Jungner and E Svärdström (eds). *Västergötlands runinskrifter.* Stockholm 1940–1970

Webster: Webster´s Third New International Dictionary, 2000.

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