LORD AND LADY – *BRYTI AND DEIGJA*

SOME HISTORICAL AND ETYMOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FAMILY, PATRONAGE AND SLAVERY IN EARLY SCANDINAVIA AND ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

BY

STEFAN BRINK

PROFESSOR OF SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

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Some Historical and Etymological Aspects of Family, Patronage and Slavery in Early Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England

SOMETIMES RESEARCH CAN BE SUCH FUN. YOU HAPPEN UPON AN illuminating source, a clever word from a fellow-scholar or a passage in a book or an article. You are faced with a problem that you have to solve. It’s like a thriller, or as we say in Swedish, a ‘pusseldeckare’; you have the corpus delictum or better delicti, you have some idea of the modus and the plot; now you have to find evidence in order to solve the problem and wrap up the case.

In this particular case I came across the following facts that puzzled me. In all the handbooks and lexica a bryti was defined as an unfree servant, steward or bailiff. For example, in Kulturhistoriskt lexikon (KL) it is stated that a bryti was an attendant among the slaves on a farm, who later on turned into a bailiff and ended up in the late Middle Ages as a tenant, a copyholder. An original function is said to have been that of delivering the food amongst the slaves. In the more recent Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde (RGA) Svend Gissel writes that bryti ‘bezeichnet einen Unfreien oder Freigelassenen, der über die anderen Unfreien eines Hofes die Aufsicht führte, einen Verwalter oder Schaffner’, whereas Grethe Authén-Blom, with reference to early Norway, says: ‘Ursprünglich war einer der obersten unfreien Knechte mit dieser Aufgabe [to deliver drinks and food] betraut. Ein bryti konnte auch eine Art Hausverwalter oder Schaffner über dem unfreien Gesinde sein.’ The original status of the bryti is corroborated with citations from provincial laws, such as the Older Västgöta Law, the Östgöta

1 Fridlev Skrubbeltrang, Nils Lid and Gerhard Hafström in KL 2, 1957, cols 269–73.
3 RGA 4, 1981, 27.
law, The Frostating Law and the Law of Jutland, which are supposed to show the antiquity of this institution.

This received opinion can be tested against what we know of the bryti institution found in the inscriptions on Viking-Age rune stones. Unfortunately there are very few occurrences of the word bryti in runic inscriptions, but these rare examples tell a completely different story from that found in the legal sources.

On the famous rune stone at Hovgården (U 11) on the island of Adelsö, opposite the more famous island of Björkö where Birka is located, we can read:

\[ \text{raþu runað ret lit rista toler bry[t]i i roþ kunuki toler auk gyla litu ris . . . paun hion eftin . . . k merki srni . . . hakun baþ rista} \]

\[ \text{Rað fo runak, Rett let rista Tolið bryti i Roð kunungi. Tolið ok Gylla letu ris[a . . . ], paun hion eftis [s]k(?) merki . . . Hakon bað rista,} \]

which has been translated as

Interpret the runes! Tólir the steward of Roþr had them rightly carved for the King. Tólir and Gylla had [the runes] carved . . . this married couple as a landmark in memory of themselves(?) . . . Hákon ordered (it) be carved. This very important historical runic inscription from probably the middle of the eleventh century is not easy to interpret. Elias Wessén (in U) assumes that the erection and the carving of the inscription was commissioned by the king, and that that king was the Hákon who is mentioned at the end of the inscription. Wessén, and many with him, have connected the passage ‘bryti i Rodh’ with the case in the Östgöta Law (Dråpsb. 14) which deals with iarlfs bryti i roþzs bo, and he thinks that Tolið bryti was the King’s ombudsman in the district called Roden (i.e. the coastal area). Erland Hjärne argues –

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5 Samnordisk runtextdatabas (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/samnord.htm).
6 According to the Samnordisk runtextdatabas it is to be dated to 1075–85.
7 Many, such as Sophus Bugge, Otto von Friesen, Erik Brate and Elias Wessén (see Erland Hjärne, ‘Röd och runor’, in Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundets i Uppsala Arbok 1946, 66 n. 5), have identified the Hakon mentioned in the text with King Hakon the Red (Håkan röde), who, according to Erik Brate (Sveriges runinskrifter (Natur och kultur 11) 2nd ed. Stockholm 1928, 76), supposedly lived c. 1066–79 (see also Samnordisk runtextdatabas).
in my opinion quite convincingly – against Wessén’s interpretation, and instead proposes that Tölrik bryti was a bailiff, a manager on the royal farm Hovgården.8

On a very badly damaged rune stone in Gillberga in Västerljung, Hölebo, in the province of Södermanland, we can read sigualti r[aisti. .kil b]rutia sin (Sö 42), which is probably to be understood as ‘Sigvalde erected . . . (after) . . . (Tor)kel his bryte’. And finally, the last example we have from Denmark, on a rune stone from Randbøl on Jutland dated to the late tenth century we read: tufi bruti risþi stin þansí aft lika brutia þir stafar munu þurkuni miuk liki lifa (DR 40), i.e. Tøfi bryti resþi sten þansí æft lika brytia. Ær stafar munu Þorgunni miok lengi lifa, which has been translated as: ‘Tøfi Steward raised this stone in memory of the steward’s helpmate. Very long will these staves live for Þorgunnr.’9 The Randbøl rune stone has been described by Erik Moltke as ‘the ugliest rune stone in Denmark – but its inscription is the most beautiful and touching of all’,10 and it is furthermore one of the few Danish rune stones obviously standing on its original site. In Denmark rune stones have been looked upon as some kind of indication of power in the landscape, alluding to ‘aristocrats’ and the highest level in society, and this assumption is probably correct in most cases,11 suggesting that this Tøfi bryti must have had a rather prominent social position. Erik Moltke hence assumes that the term bryti here ‘may refer to a king’s overseer’.12

This runic evidence unambiguously indicates that a bryti in the tenth and eleventh centuries was to be found rather high up the

9 Samnordisk runtextdatabas.
12 Moltke, Runes and their origin, 298.
social ladder, in the case of the Hovgården stone (and perhaps also the Randbøl stone) a man in close proximity to the King, probably his bailiff, and hence not a slave, on the very lowest rung. The consensus of the handbooks on the originally unfree status of the *bryti* is actually surprising. There are legal rules in some provincial law codes indicating that a *bryti* was not free, but the runic evidence, older by 200–300 years, tells a different story, although it admittedly makes no explicit reference to whether the legal status of the *bryti* was free or not. The problem of the status of the *bryti* is puzzling.

The word *bryti* (< *brūtjan*) is a *nomen agentis* derived from the verb ON *brytja* ‘to break into pieces’, and with the evidence of some provincial laws, together with the fact that the word has been borrowed into Finnish as *ruttio*, *ruttia* with meanings like ‘slave’ as well as ‘bailiff’, it is understandable that *bryti* has been interpreted as denoting a slave and a bound steward, the one in charge of the slaves’ household and the one who delivers food to the slaves.

More unambiguous is the ON word *deigja*, found in dialects in Scandinavia as *deja*, *deje* etc. with meanings like ‘milkmaid’, ‘house-keeper’, but also ‘concubine’, which is a later development. A letter from 1338 places a *deigja* on an equal footing with a *bryti*, as do also the Gulating Law (198), Erik’s Zealand Law (3:19), the Older Västgöta Law (Ärvdab. 16) and the Younger Västgöta Law (Ärvdab. 21).

In the letter in question, Bishop Haakon of Bergen sacks a priest in Os parish and replaces him with a new one, and in the letter he addresses the former priest’s ‘hjón’, i.e. servants, and he names them ‘bryti’ and ‘deighia’ or ‘other hjón’ (*at stemfnna hiunum sira Peters hwart sem þat er bryti, deighia eðr onnur hiun*)

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The etymology of *deigja* reveals incontrovertibly that it referred originally to a female baker, someone who kneaded the dough and prepared bread. The word is derived from ON *deig* n. ‘dough’. The word *deigja* occurs sparsely in early written sources, only once in *Lokasenna* (56), in the Gulating and Frostating Laws and in the above-mentioned letter from 1338. Only in the Norwegian laws is it intimated that the *deigja* was not free; in the Gulating Law this is fairly obvious, in the Frostating Law not so explicit. In *Lokasenna* and in the letter from 1338 there is nothing to indicate whether the maid is of free status. To conclude, in early Scandinavia a *deigja* was a female servant in a household, in later times a *deja* was a milkmaid or a housekeeper, but the etymology confirms that she must originally have been a bread baker. It is notable that the use of *deigja* in the Gulating Law, and perhaps also in the Frostating Law, occurs in an obvious slave context.

This leads us over to England, and the obvious connection is, of course, with the word *lady*, OE *hlāf-dighe*, *hlāf-dēghe*, a word compounded of OE *hlāf* ‘bread (probably unleavened bread)’ and OE *dāg* m. ‘dough’, which makes it clear that an original meaning of *lady* was also ‘bread baker’. In medieval texts *lady* often has meanings like ‘a mistress in relation to servants or slaves(?); the female head of a household’.

The male equivalent, the *lord*, OE *hlāf-ward*, is a compound of *hlāf* ‘bread’ and *ward* ‘keeper, guardian’. In lexica the word is

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18 Cf. *KLE* 2. 492–93.


20 *ODEE*, 511–12.

21 *ODEE*, 537.
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normally translated as ‘the warden or keeper of bread’, and the primary sense is the head of the household, the master of those dependent on him for their daily bread.22 In the earliest Anglo-Saxon laws lord is used for a kind of ‘seigneur’. In Ine’s law we find the lord as the ‘lord of the slaves’ (3:§1, 24, 74) as well as a lord of freemen (3:§2).23

The word lord is an exclusively Anglo-Saxon word, not found in other Germanic languages,24 and it is in the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary that we find some extremely interesting words relating to lord and lady, and probably alluding to an ancient institution which we get some insight into thanks to these Anglo-Saxon words.

I am referring, besides hlæf-weard and hlæf-dighe, to hlæf-æta m., hlæf-brytta m. and hlæf-gang m.25 All these compounds have hlæf ‘bread’ as the first element. Whereas the hlæf-weard is the keeper or warden of the bread and the hlæf-dighe the bread baker, the hlæf-brytta is the one who breaks the bread and probably distributes it, the hlæf-æta is the one who eats the bread that the lady has baked, the lord has provided and the hlæf-brytta has divided and distributed. And finally, we have a term for all the members of the household that the lord had the responsibility for feeding, the whole gang so to speak: namely hlæf-gang, hence all of the hlæf-ætan.

24 However, Otto von Friesen (‘Till tolkningen af Tune-stenen’. Arkiv för nordisk filologi 16, 1900, 197) has made the interesting suggestion that the word also existed in the Old Nordic language. In one of the manuscripts of Snorra Edda, the fragmentary Eddu-Brot (AM 748 4to), we have the hapax legomenon hleifnuðr as a heiti for Óðinn (Snorra Edda 2 p. 555). von Friesen assumes that this word might be a folk-etymological reinterpretation of an older ON hleifþr, in conjunction with the many Óðinsheiti in -uðr (Dœrruðr, Geiguðr, Váfuðr, Rœnuðr etc.). On the other hand, since this word is found only here, and other mss of Snorra Edda have other forms, Hlæfþr and Hlefruðr, the hypothesis must be looked upon as more or less a shot in the dark.
What we find here is an institution, a collective defined on the basis of the bread which was obviously used metaphorically for food very early on, hence a household, a family. As pointed out, the terminology revealing the existence of this institution, at least these compounds with *hlāf-*, is only found in Anglo-Saxon. However, the Scandinavian terms deigja and bryti must – as I see it – be directly equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon *hlāf-dighe* and *hlāf-brytta*, the only difference being that we lack the qualifier in the Old Nordic words. We do not have any equivalent of the *lord* or the *hlāf-æta* or *hlāf-gang* in Nordic. All the same, the words deigja and bryti reveal that in early Scandinavia we probably had the same institution, a kind of household defined on the basis of the bread, as we find in Anglo-Saxon England.

We have thus reached the stage where we have to start to try to explain, where we have to root these words in some kind of historical context, to make the institution we have before our eyes historically understandable.

When I first came across this institution, I thought that the phenomenon was to be explained in the context of the Germanic warrior’s household, the retinue or Gefolgschaft, the collective around the chieftain or king in his hall, and that the *hlāf*, the bread as a metaphor for food, alluded to the grand meals and banquets that occurred and in a way defined the hall-culture, an institution that later developed into the feudal hof-institution. This would place the *hlāf-*institution in roughly the eighth to the eleventh centuries. Today I know better. It must be older than this, and it is not to be placed in a warrior’s household, the Gefolgschaft or the comitatus, which had a different and more developed terminology. It is my opinion today that we have to go back to an archaic Germanic household institution, with obvious roots in the Roman familia. To understand this, we have to try to get some insight into the archaic Germanic familia.

If von Friesen’s assumption is correct, however, we also had the *hleifórðr* in ON (see above). A semantically similar word must be the *brotherr* ‘lord, steward’, OHG *brôðêrro*, found in German (see e.g. http://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw/, art. *brother*).
In Roman times the basic unit in society was the *familia* or *domus* ‘house’. This, of course, is also valid for earlier Greek society, and its *oikos*. Actually, Aristotle defines a State, in his *Politics* (I:2–5),\(^{27}\) as founded on the *oikos*, the families. The head of the Roman *familia* was the *paterfamilias* or the *dominus* (cf. *dominate*), who had ultimate authority over the members. In ancient Roman times *familia* could refer to both persons and property.\(^ {28}\) The word *familia* is obviously to be derived from *famulus*, a common word for slave.\(^ {29}\) This word, in turn, seems to have been borrowed into early Latin from the Oscan language, the Oscans being a neighbouring people to the Romans.\(^ {30}\) The borrowing hypothesis seems very probable, and has plenty of parallels, where a word for a slave has been borrowed from a neighbouring people, such as the Greek *doûlos*, from some non-Indo-European language in Asia Minor, and Latin *servus*, which seems to be borrowed from Etruscan.\(^ {31}\) The word *familia* thus originally had the meaning of ‘a band of slaves’. The Roman novelist Apuleius wrote in the second century: ‘Fifteen free men make a people, fifteen slaves make a family, and fifteen prisoners make a jail.’\(^ {32}\) As David Herlihy concludes: ‘The word in its original sense thus implied an authoritarian structure and hierarchical order founded on but not limited to relations of marriage and parenthood . . . Authority, in sum, and not consanguinity, not even marriage, was at the core of the ancient concept of family.’\(^ {33}\) The head of the *familia*, the *paterfamilias*, had, according to the Roman law, the


\(^{28}\) See Ulpian, *Digest* 50.16.195; *Codex Justinianus* 6.38.5.


\(^{33}\) Herlihy, ‘Family’, 3.
father’s full authority, the *patria potestas*, which was absolute, including even the *ius necis*, the right to put to death members of his family.

In Roman society, and obviously also in early Germanic society, a family did not consist only of the husband and wife and children, as in the modern sense of the word. A *familia* was an extended collective including relatives, servants and slaves, thus the *famuli* were all the people the *paterfamilias* had power over. What is to be noted is that owing to the authority of the *paterfamilias*, his *patria potestas*, the members of a *familia* had a status that was not free, strictly speaking, which, from a legal point of view, in a way equated them with slaves, something that several Roman lawmen comment on.

The model for the Roman *familia* clearly was the early Roman ‘slave household, band of slaves’. This fact probably has deep implications for understanding the bonds in later co-operative groups, such as the warrior’s household of the migration period, and the retinues in the hall-society of the Anglo-Saxon and Vendel/Viking period.

An early *Parochia* or *Dioecesis* in the Roman world, i.e. a Christian congregation in a *Civitas*, also bore the obvious fingerprint of the *familia* model. The *paterfamilias* in this religious *familia* was the bishop and the close members of the family were his deacons and priests; the extended family were the Christian disciples in the city. This ‘family’ or congregation had their own important –

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36 E.g. Ulpian, *Digest*, 50.16.195.
37 This is noted by Ulpian in the second century AD in his *Digest* 50.16.195: *servitium quoque solemus appellare familias* ‘We are also accustomed to describe slaves as forming a household’ (Trans. Alan Watson in Justinian, *Digest*, 950).
constituting – ritual meal, the Holy Communion, where bread and wine were transformed into Christ’s flesh and blood.

In the same way the most elementary social group in Europe in the period after the fall of Rome was the family. Before the emergence of such institutions as the state and the parish it represented the basic social group and unit of production in the rural economy. In a society of the kind we are dealing with, food supplies were limited. The threat of famine was acute and always imminent, in a way we cannot possibly understand today. Therefore to be part of a family, and in receipt of the benevolence it could provide, was essential. However, the threat did not hang equally over everyone. The ‘Man of Power’ showed himself, first of all, as the man who could always eat, and eat as much as he wanted. This figure therefore achieved a very central position, because he was also able to feed his subordinates if he so wished. He was the one who provided the food.

This fact is also reflected among aristocratic families. The essence of Germanic lordship can only be grasped, Otto Brunner emphasises, through the lord’s house and household, which was the organisational core and the legal centre of lordship. This field of research – family, kindred, clan, state and lordship – has been thoroughly studied over a long period by German and Austrian scholars such as Walter Schlesinger, Otto Brunner, Karl Schmid, Karl Bosl and lately Gerd Althoff; outside the German-speaking world important contributions have been produced by the Cambridge scholars Bertha Phillpotts, Jack Goody and D. H. Green and the American historian

David Herlihy. From these studies we can conclude that the Germanic family or household was very similar to the Roman familia, with obvious roots in the latter. In West Germanic languages words used for such a unit were OHG hiwôn, OE hiwan m. pl., OE hiwen n. and hirêd m. ‘household, members of a family’, and the substantivated adjective hiwisc ‘household’. The caput was called hêrro, truthin or frô in OHG and had a similar role to that of the paterfamilias in the Roman familia. The power he could exercise was called mund m. ‘guardianship, protection’; another name for the hêrro was therefore OHG mundboro, OE mundbora. His duty was to protect his family and to put food on the table, which links with the Anglo-Saxon term lord (< hlôf-weard) for the caput, and the semantically identical German brotherr.

An important social institution that was fundamental to Germanic culture in this period was the military retinue around a king or chieftain, the Gefolgschaft or, in Latin, the comitatus. This institution was modelled on the normal family unit. This fact is underlined by the etymology of the word for such a retinue, OE hirêd m. ‘retinue, family, household’, which is derived from the stem *hiw- that we find in the aforementioned OHG hiwon, OE hiwan m. pl., OE hiwen n. and also in ON hjú n. pl. ‘family’. The ON híðr f. ‘retinue’ is obviously a loan from Anglo-Saxon. Therefore it has been assumed

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42 For these words, see West Germanic etymological dictionaries; D. H. Green, _The Carolingian Lord_. Cambridge 1965.

– for excellent reasons – that the Germanic *comitatus* grew out of the family household, with reflexes, for instance, in *Beowulf*, where King Hrothgar’s retinue were the members of his household.44

The head of the retinue, OHG *truht*, OE *dryht*, ON *drótt* (< PGmc *druhti*–), was called OHG *truhtin*, OE *dryhten*, ON *dróttinn* (< PGmc *druhtinaz*), and the followers had to subject themselves to his jurisdiction. The bond that tied them to the leader was the oath of fidelity, which gave them the new rank of ‘table companion’, the right to share the table and bread with the leader and the rest of the retinue. From historical and linguistic evidence, you obviously entered into this kind of retainership as a youngster, a child. Several words for ‘retainer’ seem to have the earlier meaning ‘child’, such as OHG *thegan*, OE *ðegn*, ON *þegn* (cf. Greek *téknon* ‘child’, OI *tákman* ‘child’), and maybe also ON *rekkr*,45 *sveinn* and *drengr*.46 In eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England, for example, a group of young warriors called *geoguð* ‘youth’ was found around the king, unmarried men that had not yet settled on landed estates, a very mobile retinue in several respects. A member of the *geoguð* was a vital brick in the power puzzle of that time, in that he could move and offer his services to the highest bidder. The main payment a member of the *geoguð* could expect was a share of tribute and booty.47 Beside the ‘youths’ (*geoguð*) stood the ‘tried men’ (*duguð*),

44 Schlesinger, *Beiträge zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte* . . . 1 passim.
46 See de Vries, *Altnord. etym. Wörterb. passim* — Cf. also the common Lat. *vassus* ‘retainer, servant, slave’ found in several Germanic laws, such as *Pactus legis Salicae*, *Lex Alamannorum* and *Lex Baiwariorum*; see von Oldenburg, *Die Bezeichnungen für Soziale Stände . . . in den Leges Barbarorum*, 231–34, which is the base for *vasall* ‘servant’, and which is assumed to come from a Gallo-Latin *vassus*, originating in a Celtic word for ‘child’; compare Cymr. *gwas* ‘child, servant’ (Kluge, 948).
married retainers in a king’s following with landed estates. When a
member of the geoguð had proved himself to his lord’s satisfaction,
he could receive a suitable endowment from the king, and move
out from the lord’s household. It has been assumed that in Germanic
societies this *comitatus* institution, an early *hird*, *hirð*, consisted of
the ‘private’ household of the leader, an institution that developed
into the later hird, *hirð* of the king or chieftain in his hall.

An overview of the relevant material in this Germanic word-
group shows that we have to assume two Ablaut-related stems:
Proto-Germanic *hiwa-* and *hïwa-*. These two stems evolved
from Proto-Nordic to Old Nordic thus: *hiwa-* > *hy-*, *hïwa-* > *hëwa-* > *hë/hëa-*, in the same way as *sliwa-* > ON *sly* ‘slimy
water plant’, *sliwa-* > *slewa* > *slé*, ODa *sle* (Danish *sle* ‘a
weather between frost and thaw’). This must be the background to
the parallels ODa *hëski*, *hëskap* ‘household, home’ (*hë < *hëwa-
< *hiwa-*) and ON *hyski* ‘household’, *hy* ‘family, household’, (*hy-
< *hïwa-*)).

Relevant Old Germanic words formed from these stems are:
ON *hý* ‘family, household’, ON *hýski*, OE *hiwisc*, OHG *hiwiski
‘family, household’ (< *hiwiskia*), ODa *hëski* ‘household, home’
(< *hëwiskia*), *hýbýli*, with the variant form *hýbýli*, *hýrógi n.
‘animosity between members of a household’ (*Hávamál* 137), ON *hýi*
‘slave, servant’ (< *hıyian* or *hiw(i)an* probably with an original meaning ‘the one who belongs to the
family’, ON *hý* ‘family, household’ (< *hïwa*), OHG *hiwo* m.

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49 Schlesinger, *Beiträge zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte . . .*, vol. 1, 11 and passim.
50 Already assumed by F. Tamm (*Etymologisk svensk ordbok*, vol. 1. 1890–
1904, 364), later also by Sigmund Feist (*Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der
gotischen Sprache*. Leiden 1939, 253) and J. Brøndum Nielsen (see n. 52).
52 For the different sound changes leading up to these stems and words, see Tamm, *Etym. sv. ordb.*., pp. 309–10; J. Brøndum-Nielsen, *Gammeldansk Grammatik*, vol. 1. Copenhagen 1950, §§ 61, 75, 111:2, 117:2, 162.
‘husband’, OHG *hiwa f. ‘wife’, OSax *hiwa f. ‘wife’, ON *hjú(n), *hjón n. ‘married couple; household members; servants’ (actually dual *híwôna n. of a PGmc *hiwan n.), OE *hiwan, OHG *hiwon

family, household’, Gothic *heiwafrauja ‘lord of a household, family’, OE *hirêd ‘household, family’, OHG *hirât ‘marriage’ (< *hiw-ræd), ON *hýr adj. ‘mild, friendly, happy’ (< *hiurja, literally something like ‘suitable as a household member’), ON *hjúka ‘to care, treat’ (< *hjú-kan), ON *hjá prep. ‘at’, actually ‘visiting someone’s household’ (< *hiwa), and perhaps also ON herad, OSw *hrað ‘administrative district’, where one proposal is (< *hiwa-rāda), although the etymology of this latter word is much disputed.

The two parallel stems have thus resulted in word pairs like ON *hý (< *hiwa) : ON *hjá (< *hiwa), ON *hýski (< *hiwiskia), and perhaps also ON herad, OSw *hrað (< *hiwa-rāda) : *hirâd (< *hiw-ræd). The words discussed here are of course related to Lat. *civis ‘citizen’. A variant with a short vowel (*civis) seems to be unknown in Latin. Indeed, since the short-stem variant (*hiwa-) is only to be found in North Germanic, exclusive to the Old Scandinavian languages, it is likely to be an innovation.

In Anglo-Saxon England, Bede talks about the land of one family (terra unius familiae) as a unit, a tract of land. He states that the region of the south Saxons consists of the land of 7,000 families, and that the measure (mensura) of the Isle of Wight is, according to the English mode of reckoning, he states, 1,200 families. The OE term equivalent to Bede’s terra unius familiae was *hîd, sometimes *hiwisc or *hiwscipe (discussed above). The *hîd probably refers to the land of one family. Maitland also discusses how large such an

54 von Oldberg, Bezeichnungen für Soziale Stände, 238–40.
55 Compare the preposition Swedish hos ‘at’, actually a weakly stressed form of hus ‘house’, in the same way as French chez derives from Lat. casa ‘house’.
56 See etymological dictionaries of the Germanic languages.
57 See Hellquist, Svensk etym. ordb., 356.
58 For this information I thank Prof. Monica Hedlund, Inst. of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University.
early Anglo-Saxon family was: 'we may reasonably guess that the household was much larger in the seventh . . . century. We might expect to find married brothers or even married cousins under one roof.'

The archaic Proto-Nordic word *hiwa-/*hiwa- ‘family’ seems also to be found in a man’s name hiwigaz nom., found on an early rune stone from Årstad, Sokndal, Rogaland in Norway, perhaps from the sixth century, and which has been seen as a parallel to the adj. OE hiwisc, OHG hiwiski and ON hýski. On the Hassmyra runestone in Västmanland (Vs 24) we read the touching epitaph for a deceased wife:

\[
\text{buonti × kuþr × hulmoet × lit × resa × ufter × oþintisu × kunu × seno × kumbr × hifrya × tî × hasuimura × iki betr × þon × byi rapr røpbali × risti × runi × ðisa × sikmuntar × uan. . .sestn × kup}
\]

which has been translated as:

The good husbandman Holmgautr had (the stone) raised in memory of Óðindísa, his wife.

and then, in poetic form,

There will not come to Hassmyra a better mistress who holds sway over the farm. Balle the Red cut these runes. To Sigmundr was Óðindísa a good sister.

Here we have the compound (probably) hefrøya ‘the mistress of the family, household’, which has a direct, although male, counterpart in the Gothic heiwa-frauja ‘the head of the family’. An apparently closer parallel is found on the Malsta runestone according to a new

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60 Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, 519.
The famous and historically important inscription goes:

hrumunt rit. . .staina þina| |afti R  hikiulf- ÷ brisa sun ÷ in brisi uas | lia sun : in lini uas unar sun : in un ua. . . .faks| |sun l(n) |(u)faka þuris| |sun krua uas mujin hikiulf. . . in þa barlaf in þa kuþrun + hrumunt hikiulfa sun fabi runan þisan : uin sutum stin þina nur i balas. . .in : kiullin uarþ um lanti þisu in þa nur i uika i þrim bium in þa lanakr in þa ðibrasiu

which can be translated as:

Hróðmundr erected this/these stone/s in memory of Hé-Gylfir, Bresi’s/Brísi’s son. And Bresi/Brísi was Lini’s(?) son. And Lini(?) was Unn’s son. And Unn was Ófeigr’s son. And Ófeigr was Þórir’s son. Gróa was Hé-Gylfir’s mother. And then <barlaf>. And then Guðrún. Hróðmundr Hé-Gylfir’s son coloured these runes. We sought this stone in the north in Balasteinn. Gylfir acquired this land and then in Vika in the north / further north three estates, and then Lønangri and then Feðrasjór.55

The hi- in the name hikiulf- is probably, like the hi- ‘family’ in hiwigaz and hifrya, to be seen as a qualifier in a by-name for Gylve, the head of an important or large family, who has acquired a lot of land for his household. Peterson, however, hesitates between this possibility and ON hé- ‘outer appearance, deceptive appearance’ which gives the by-name OSw He-Gylfi ‘the light-haired Gylfi’.

I would prefer the former explanation, for semantic reasons. This runic hi- could be understood as equivalent to an ON hý, PGmc *hiwa- ‘family, house’, but according to the considerations set out by Lena Peterson perhaps the short stem *hiwa- is more probable, since /y:/ would normally be represented in runes as iu, /æ:/ and /æ/ as a, while /i:/, /i/, /e:/ and /e/ could all be denoted by i.57 One can also note in the inscription the five-generation rule for claiming legal access to the *hiwa-, the household and its farms and land, hence this family’s oðal.58

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64 Peterson, ‘The Graphemic System’.
65 See Samnordisk runtextdatabas (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/samnord.htm).
68 See Stefan Brink, ‘Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia’. In The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An
A fundamental aspect when dealing with archaic and medieval society is of course lordship, dependence and patronage. In the Middle Ages there were two essentially different forms of lordship, over the free and over the legally unfree. The former was based on mutual faith between a vassal or a lord, and not on command and obedience. This was the system that became the normal means of government in feudal Europe, beginning in the eighth century and becoming the essential instrument of lordship in Europe from the ninth century onwards. The latter, with roots in Roman society and its familia, was exercised over the family (large or small in number) and included all members of a ‘household’, ranging from family members, through servants, maids, tenants, slaves, to the functionaries who carried out special tasks in relation to administration and military services. There seems to be a consensus today among historians that this kind of lordship over the unfree, the familia or household model, was the one used for all medieval lordship.69

It was a common custom for young men in the upper social stratum to attach themselves to a lord, a princeps, and to be a part of his retinue. The main purpose was of course to win fame in battles and war, and for the principes a large following was an honourable acquisition that laid the foundation for power and a grand reputation. At least according to Tacitus, and thus at an early period, the followers were free to leave during peacetime. In German scholarship this early Gefolgschaft is considered to have been very much a free man’s choice in a partnership which, if not equal, was at least based on free will, in which followers could come and go by their own choice.70 I am not so sure that this was the case. I assume that fairly early on these retinues were tied to the lord by certain obligations and bonds and also bound by oath-taking,71 something that of course is also found in the later feudal lordship. This kind of dependence amounted to a personal relationship between a lord and a follower.

An example of a man who has sworn an oath to his lord is the ON væringi (pl. væringjar), in Russian varjag, perhaps – according to the traditional explanation – originally a retainer of the Varangian guard in Constantinople. This word contains the stem vár- ‘oath, promise’ found in ON várar f. pl., OE wēr f., OHG wāra f., and it has recently been suggested that it is compounded with Proto-Nordic *-gangian, giving the word væringi the meaning ‘one who has taken an oath’, ‘one who has “walked” into a binding relationship by swearing an oath’.72

It is a well known fact that a whole series of bonds emerged in the Middle Ages, imitating the familia and the kinship model from the Migration Period and earlier on. Thus the guilds and the military retinue were modelled on the structure of the family. The aim was to reproduce the conditions and obligations existing within the family group. With no functional state or other superior power, every part of medieval life was shaped by personal bonds. This network of personal ties and associations was necessary in a society that was essentially hostile, and that in turn led to a culture where war and fighting were idealised.73 The bonds between the individuals within these groups, and especially the family, guaranteed security and support in every area of life. Co-operative groups, guilds or coniurationes, were thus formed to protect the individual in the local community. They were legal bodies in their own right, just like a retinue. They developed their own leadership arrangements, had their own jurisdiction and had communal funds and property.

The situation regarding the military retinue in early Scandinavia was probably identical to that found in West-Germanic areas. The reason for believing so is that archaeology and early poetry point to

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a more or less pan-Germanic ‘aristocratic’ culture during this period. The word for an early Scandinavian retinue, as already noted, was hirð, obviously a loan from the Anglo-Saxon hīrǣd. A more genuine term for a Scandinavian retinue was probably drōtt or lið found on the famous runestone from Karlevi on Öland (Öl 1), where the inscription starts with

\[\text{s-a...-(s) i(a)s satr aifir si(b)}(a) kuþa sun fultars in hons liþi sati at u -ausa-þ...}\]

This stone is set up in memory of Sibbi Góði/Goði, son of Foldarr, and his retainer (en hans liði) set on...

These kinds of hirð, drōtt or lið – or any kind of co-operative friendship or communal group, such as the ON gildi,\(^75\) the þing (for instance on Gotland, see below) and the goðorð in Iceland, or for that matter an Oxbridge college – carried with them an obligation of mutual support and help. When people entered into a bond within a group, they performed some ritual, most likely swearing an oath, to support each other, and in the case of a retinue, to help and defend their lord and leader, literally to lay their lives in the hands of the lord. It was then important, from an ideological point of view, that this group, which was bound by oaths of fidelity and friendship, should take their meals together. The communal meal – with a later reflection in the Oxbridge colleges’ High Table – strengthened the bonds between the members, and it was a reflection of the familia, the basic model these groups were trying to relive.

This leads us to the hlāf-, that is, to the fact that we have a terminology focused on the bread and its providers: the baker of bread, the breaker of bread, the bread-eater and the gang that gathered around the table to eat the bread. Obviously this goes back to the institution of the familia, the household members who shared the food. Our knowledge of meals and food consumption is unfortunately rather limited for early medieval Europe.

\(^74\) Cf. Samnordisk runtextdatabas (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/samnord.htm), which however has the translation ‘retinue’, which must be a mistake for ‘retainer’. A liði ‘retainer’ was part of a lið ‘retinue’.

\(^75\) The word ON gildi (< PGmc gelða-), a derivation of ON gald, Goth gild ‘money, payment’, is borrowed into English as guild (see e.g. SAOB, G401).
The well-known French *Annales*-historian, Georges Duby, has written:

We know very little about the food of early medieval man in western Europe outside the monastic communities. Here is an excellent and urgent subject for research upon which further progress the history of rural economy may well depend.\(^{76}\)

For Europe in general, however, Duby concludes that ‘documents . . . reveal the universal acceptance of bread as a basic foodstuff, even in the least civilized regions of the Christian world’.\(^{77}\) This fact also has a reflex in early Anglo-Saxon society. An isolated clause in the law of King Ine seems to imply that a normal render in a village had to deliver to a lord in a ten-hide estate in Wessex 10 sheep, 10 geese, 20 chickens, 10 cheeses, 10 measures of honey, 12 ‘ambers’ of clear ale, an ‘amber’ full of butter, 5 salmon, 2 full-grown oxen or 10 wethers and 100 eels for royal consumption, but first and foremost 300 round loaves.\(^{78}\) There is no doubt that bread ‘was the mainstay of existence’ for medieval man in Europe.\(^{79}\)

Since the everyday struggle for survival was the main occupation of ordinary people – as pointed out above, famine was never far away in medieval society – the meal became a sacrosanct occasion, often conducted with some ritual, with invocations to gods. This continues into the ‘hall-culture’, where a grand banquet, an ON *veizla*, was a most precious gift to one’s subordinates and followers. These kinds of ritual meal have an interesting counterpart in the archaic Old Gotlandic *Guta saga*, in the first chapter of which we can read:

Firir þan tima ok lengi eptir sîpþu menn a hult ok a hauga, vi ok staðgarþa ok a haipþu gulp. Blotþu þair synum ok dytrum sinum ok fileþi miþ mati ok mungati. Pet gierþu þair eptir vantro sinni. Land alt haþþi sir hoystu blotan miþ fulki. Ellar haþþi huer þriþiung sir. En smeri þing haþþu mindri blotan miþ fileþi, mati ok mungati, sum haita suþnautar, þy et þair suþu allir saman. (*Guta saga* ch. 1)

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\(^{77}\) Georges Duby, *Rural Economy*, 9.


Prior to that time, and for a long time afterwards, people believed in groves and grave howes, holy places and ancient sites, and in heathen idols. They sacrificed their sons and daughters, and cattle, together with food and ale. They did that in accordance with their ignorance of the true faith. The whole island held the highest sacrifice on its own account, with human victims, otherwise each third held its own. But smaller assemblies held a lesser sacrifice with cattle, food, and drink. Those involved were called 'boiling-companions', because they all cooked their sacrificial meals together.80

Here it is said that the þing on Gotland, obviously a small group of people, had collective sacrificial meals, and the members of this group were called supnautar, a hapax legomenon in Old Swedish, consisting of the verb suða 'to cook' (a word related to ON seyðir 'cooking pit' and sauðr 'sheep' as well as Old Gotlandic sauhr 'well' and to Gothic sauðs f. 'sacrifice', hence with a semantic content of something cooked and sacrificed – and eaten),81 and nøte, pl. nøtar 'companion', cf. Germ. Genossen. We have a synonym in ON motunautr 'eating companion'; cf. motuneyti 'eating group'.82

We have all read about the grand feast during the Middle Ages, the convivium, where a lord entertained his followers, but the communal meal – for profane as well as religious purposes – was important at all levels in society, at the þing-congregation as on Gotland, at the guild and in the family; friendships were made and strengthened at such meals. Gerd Altoff has stated in his important book Family, Friends and Followers. Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe: 'Meals . . . played a prominent role in many bonds in archaic society. They were a legal ritual and performed an important social function.'83 And the main metaphor for the ritual meal was 'bread', a widespread usage already found in the Bible.

The importance of bread and the existence of a 'bread-collective' in early Scandinavia are finely illustrated on the famous Tune

81 See for instance Hellquist, Svensk etym. ordb., 916.
83 Altoff, Family, Friends and Followers, 97.
inscription from Østfold in Norway. This rune stone is to be dated to as early as around AD 400, and it is the longest and most important of the runic inscriptions in the older fuþark. It starts **ek wiwa** after **woduride witandahalaiban worahto**, **ek Wiwar** after **Woduridó witandahalaiban worahtô [rūnōs]**, which can be translated as: ‘I, Wiwa(þ), in memory of Wodurida(þ), the lord (‘bread-provider’), made the runes’. Here we have a man (Wiwar) in Østfold who, in memory of Woduridas (his lord?), erected the stone and carved the runic epitaph. He praises Woduridas with the epithet **witandahta(la)iban**, ‘the bread-provider’, which is certainly a noble title, an obvious equivalent to OE lord(< hlāf-weard). The second element in this compound is, according to Sophus Bugge and other scholars, a Proto-Nordic equivalent of the Gothic gahlaiba ‘table mate, the one you share your bread with’, literally a companion, Fr compagnon (< *compāniō from Lat. com- ‘together with’ and pānis m. ‘bread’). However, as Otto von Friesen has correctly remarked, one would expect the prefix ga- in the runic form. Instead the word must be a weak noun related to ON hleifr ‘bread’. The qualifier, witanda-, is, according to Otto von Friesen, related to a Proto-Nordic verb *witan (< PGmc *wītan-) ‘to care for’, with cognates in OE witan ‘know, understand’, OE (be-)witian ‘to regard, to care for, see to, have charge of, govern, carry out’ etc., Gothic witan ‘know’, OE wito adj. ‘decreed’, Gothic witeþ n. ‘law’ and OE wite m. ‘wise man, counsellor’, used of those who made up the witan, the Anglo-Saxon king’s council (in early Anglo-Saxon times the King’s household or family), and their assembly, the witenagemot. Hence the word is set in a semantic field consisting of meanings such as ‘knowledge’, ‘patronage’ and ‘family’.

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85 See *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*.


important qualities and assets for a chieftain to have in the Migration Period. The chieftain Wodurida was thus to be remembered as a *witand(a)lai*ban, someone who provided his subjects with bread (food).

Bread probably had a significant role not only for the Romans, but also in the early Germanic world (cf. OHG *brothërro*), even if – as has been assumed for good reasons – it was an early cultural loan from the Romans. As far as Scandinavia is concerned, the so-called Swedish *gravklot* (lit. ‘grave globes’) have received some attention in this connection. They are small round stones often incised with a cross or other ornaments, and they have been found placed on top of large burial mounds, very often dated to the early Iron Age or the middle of the first millennium. The most common explanation of these *gravklot* is that they represent round bread loaves, or then rather rolls, with the explanation that bread was part of a fertility cult or the death ritual and the cult of the dead.

During the early Iron Age, at least in Sweden, bread very often occurs in places where cultic rituals have been performed (e.g. Helgö, Uppåkra). From the late Iron Age it is not unusual for bread to be placed in graves, as in Birka. During the excavation at Helgö ‘the Holy Island’, at a place where cultic rituals most probably were performed, many items of bread, in the form of ‘buns’ as well as ‘loaves’, have been found, as well as fragments of ovens and large quantities of querns. Some of the bread was found in graves, in ovens, but interestingly enough most of it (about 70 pieces) was found below a rock believed to be a cult site. Bread was also the food of the gods. In the famous stanzas in *Hávamál* where Öðinn is retelling his own story, he says (st. 139; cf. *The Poetic Edda*, trans. C. Larrington, Oxford 1999):

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Við hleifi mik seldo né við hornigi
nýsta ek niðr
No bread did they give me nor a drink from a horn,
downwards I peered

The normal archaeological interpretation of bread in graves and at cult sites is that it has symbolic significance, presumably representing fertility and regeneration.93

The PGmc word *hlai*ba- ‘bread’ is found in most Germanic languages, and as a loan in Slavonic (as in Russian *chleb*) and Finno-Ugric (as in Finnish *laipä*). We have already seen an n-extension on the Tune rune stone (*hlaiban-*), and interestingly for our discussion we find words such as Gothic *gahlaiba* m. and OHG *gi(h)leibo* m. (< *ga-hlaiban-*) meaning ‘fellow, friend’, originally obviously ‘one you share the bread with’, thus a direct equivalent of *companion*, Fr *compagnon*.

The importance of the meal and of food in early Scandinavia came to affect Scandinavian ideology deeply. This can be illustrated from many rune stones. The warlike ideal of the Viking is vividly and eloquently expressed on rune stones and in skaldic poetry. In early Scandinavia it was also important to be a ‘good’ man. The kind of goodness referred to probably had little to do with what we mean by good in our modern world; an important aspect of being ‘good’ in Viking society was to be generous, and especially generous with food.95

On the famous Turinge stone (Sö 338) in Södermanland we read:

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ketil : auk + biorn + þain + raistu + stain + þin[a] + at + þourstain :
      tpur + sin + anuntr + at + brþpur + sin + auk : hu[skar]læ +
hifi + lafnæ + ketilau at + buanta sin * ¶ brþur uaru þæn bistra
manæ : a : lanti auk : i lîði : uti : hi(l)(l)(l)u sinu huskai(l)læ : ui- +
han + fial + i + urustu + austr + i + garþum + lis + furugi +
lanna + bestr
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Ketill and Bjorn, they raised this stone in memory of Þorsteinn, their father; Onundr in memory of his brother and the housecarls in memory of the just(?) (and) Ketiley in memory of her husband.

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93 A.-M. Hansson, ‘Bread in Birka and on Björkö’, 75.
The brothers were
among the best of men
in the land
and abroad in the retinue,
treated their
retainers or housecarls well.
He fell in battle
east in Garðar (Russia),
commander of the retinue,
the best of landholders.96

Generosity was a characteristic of a chieftain that is frequently praised in skaldic poetry and runic inscriptions. And if you were a solid, frequent and generous provider of food, this was worth praising. On the Väppeby stone in Uppland (U 703) we can read: mantr matar koþr auk mls risia, mandr matar goðr ok malsrisinn, ‘a man generous with food and eloquent’ and on the Gâdi stone, also in Uppland (U 739), Holmbjörn praises himself as mîltr matar auk mals risin, ‘liberal with food and eloquent’. On a couple of runestones we can read that the man commemorated had been mildan orða ok matar gôðan, kind with words and generous with food. This theme is also found in Hávamál (39):

Fannka ek mildan man
eða svá matar gôðan
I found no man so mild
nor so generous with food.

Being matar goðr defined a ‘good’ man.

What we are faced with here, in my opinion, is an archaic institution with special rules difficult for us to understand today, a household with a hlæfweard or a witandah(a)laiban (or for that matter an OHG brōðerro) as the caput. It has, I think, implications for our understanding of the rather complex and multi-dimensional network of dependence, patronage and lordship to be found in Scandinavia during the middle of the first millennium and in the late Iron Age (in Scandinavian terms, c. 600–1050), a point I am trying to make in a new book on slavery in early

96 Samnordisk runtextdatabas (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/samnord.htm).
Scandinavia. It would take too long to present the arguments here; suffice to say that dependence and socially and legally unfree status had many facets and levels in society, and that an important root of the institution is to be traced back to Roman society and its *familia*.

To conclude, there is an obvious link between Anglo-Saxon England and early Scandinavia — admittedly partly because both belong to the more or less homogeneous pan-Germanic culture of the period — a link formed by the PGmc *hiwa(n)*, a household institution found all over the Germanic area, including that occupied by the Goths, centred around the communal meal and the sharing of bread, a PGmc *hlaiba-gangaz* m. This Germanic ‘household’ seems to be documented in Scandinavia as early as around AD 400 with the occurrence of *witandah(a)laiban* on the Tune-stone, and it can obviously be traced back to the Roman *família*. The *hiwa(n)* ‘household’ was also used as the basis of several kinds of co-operative groups in medieval society, such as the military retinue, the *hirð* or the *līð*, and the guild, an institution which to date has received astonishingly little attention in Scandinavia. I am not talking about the town-guilds from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but an older guild institution, a Viking-Age ON *gildi*, or perhaps a *gild*-institution (a strong noun), that we have reminiscences of in our sources. In all these co-operative groups eating and drinking were of prime importance; it was the glue that bound the members together.

*97* See for instance Helge Søgaard, Sven Ljung, Grethe Authén Blom and Magnús Már Lárusson, *Kulturhistorisk lexikon för nordisk medeltid* 5. Copenhagen etc. 1960, cols 299–313. It is however interesting to note that Authén Blom (col. 309) intimates an older institution for Norway (*hvirfingsdrykkjur, samdrykkjur, sambúðargl, samkoma*) with a supposed pagan origin.

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Bibliography and Abbreviations

DN = Diplomatarium Norvegicum 1–. Oslo 1849 ff.
DR = Danmarks runeindskrifter, vols 1–3. Ed. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke. Copenhagen 1941–43. [cited as DR + nr]
Justinian Digest. See The Digest of Justinian.
ODa = Old Danish.
OE = Old English.
OHG = Old High German.
ON = Old Norse.
OSw = Old Swedish.
PGmc = Proto-Germanic.
SAOB = Svenska akademiens ordbok, vols 1–. Lund 1898 ff.
Ulpian Digest. See The Digest of Justinian.
LORD AND LADY — BRYTI AND DEIGJA


Öl = Ölands runinskrifter. Ed. Sven Söderberg and Erik Brate. Sveriges runinskrifter 1. Stockholm 1900–06. [Cited as Öl + nr]