

# Early Christians, Immigrants and Ritualized Practice

A Case Study of South-eastern Bornholm

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## Abstract

*Naum, Magdalena. 2005. Early Christians, Immigrants and Ritualized Practice. A Case Study of South-eastern Bornholm. Lund Archaeological Review 11-12 (2005-2006), pp. 17–36.*

The article studies and explains funerary rituals observed in early medieval cemeteries of south-eastern Bornholm from the perspective of *theory of practice*. Rituals, although sharing certain elements with other types of human practices, are viewed as special actions due to their formality, fixity and their outcomes. It is argued that the analysis of the funerary rituals practised by the communities of early medieval Bornholm can, on one hand, yield information about non-verbal expression of the identity of their members and, on the other hand, illuminate the circumstances and the reaction to the social and political change that took place on the island 1000–1100 AD. *Magdalena Naum, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University, Sandgatan 1, SE-223 50 Lund, Sweden.*

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to study and explain the funerary rituals observed in the early medieval cemeteries of the south-eastern Bornholm. It is argued that rituals should be seen as practices, i.e. meaningful actions of individuals, which are produced by practical, socially learned knowledge as well as by people's strategies, motivations and desires. The recognition of ritual as a practice has important consequences for archaeologists. Participants of funerary rituals communicate verbally and tacitly, among other things, through the use of material objects. These objects, which are accessible for archaeologists, deliver only fragmentary information about past handlings, yet the analysis of these objects and their context can offer guidance in inter-

preting the ceremonies and the circumstances behind them. The analysis of archaeologically recovered traces of ritual practices from Bornholm cemeteries is a basis for a discussion of the character of the communities that used these cemeteries and their socio-political and cultural settings. It is argued that early medieval Bornholm was in a stage of major social and political changes and that in these circumstances rituals were used as means of non-verbal expression of identity and as ways to overtly comment on contemporary events. Furthermore, it is also argued that studies of the funerary practices can contribute to the understanding of the character of early Christianity (its heterogeneity and dynamics) in peripheral, non-urban settings.

## Death, funeral and ritual practice

Death is arguably the most traumatic event and experience in human life. The vanishing of an individual, family member, or community member generates strong emotions that are partly associated with the physical realities of death (i.e. the disappearance of the social being and the appearance of a lifeless cadaver), and partly with the transcendent states of the decease and the uncertainty of after-life reality, which is beyond what is perceptible to the senses. The death constitutes an important marker or a major transition between a physical and a non-physical world, which cannot be left to unconscious instincts and thus has to be defined and controlled through certain actions. All the events that follow death, the funeral process, coming to terms with loss and dealing with a lifeless body are subjects of rituals. These rituals are part of human practice and as such they are to a degree habitual and transmitted without conscious intentions through social learning, through observation and participation. Nonetheless, even if rituals share certain principles with the mundane practices, they are special actions deployed with a particular meaning and characterized by formality, fixity in time and space and by repetition (Bell 1992). They are reserved for particular circumstances requiring an intensive form of communication resting on the enactment of prescribed gestures. Rituals often refer to tradition, i.e. they are based on observation, memory and practical knowledge passed from generation to generation among the members of a community. And yet deployment of tradition, as well as its neglect in the ritual acts, could be strategically chosen and manipulated by particular authorities defined as the experts on ritual (priests, elders, etc.). Through their position they are empowered to control ritual responses and use them to construct and renegotiate elements of tradition, to alter their

meaning, deploy memory and forgetfulness.

Rituals are not static and they are subject to manipulation, modification and alteration that might be a result of conscious decisions caused by, for example, tensions and political or social transformation in the community. On the other hand, the changes in ritualized practices may be of unconscious nature and partly due to a constant interplay with the always-shifting social environment that imposes and demands responses in the form of actions. Actors, however, may not be conscious of the inventions and changes to which they contribute. They may be convinced that they are still on the terrain of the old, reproducing and repeating known and learnt patterns while in reality they produce new ones.

All rituals including funerals are performances with theatre-like aspects where participants overtly follow prescribed procedures, use certain gestures and communicate verbally and tacitly. The theatrical aspect of ritual influences its participants on different levels. The joint experience of ceremony (sharing the knowledge of appropriate response) undoubtedly creates a sense of a strong bond among those who actively participate, a bond that otherwise, in the mundane reality of daily life, might actually be looser. Some argue that belonging, defined as “a step beyond membership” – solidification into “something potent and secure” – and belief, a “step beyond knowledge”, are the two primary outcomes of ritual (Marshall 2002, p. 360). In the moment of transition or collective shock, such as the death and disappearance of a community member, individuals seek the company of those who feel and think the same, and they come together and act. This phenomenon of co-presence has a direct and powerful effect on the feeling of belonging, and, as stated by Marshall, causes *deindividuation*, that is, the loss of the sense of self. This in turn results in a strong sense of unity with a group. Furthermore, he argues that the state of co-presence in a ritual situation may lead to con-

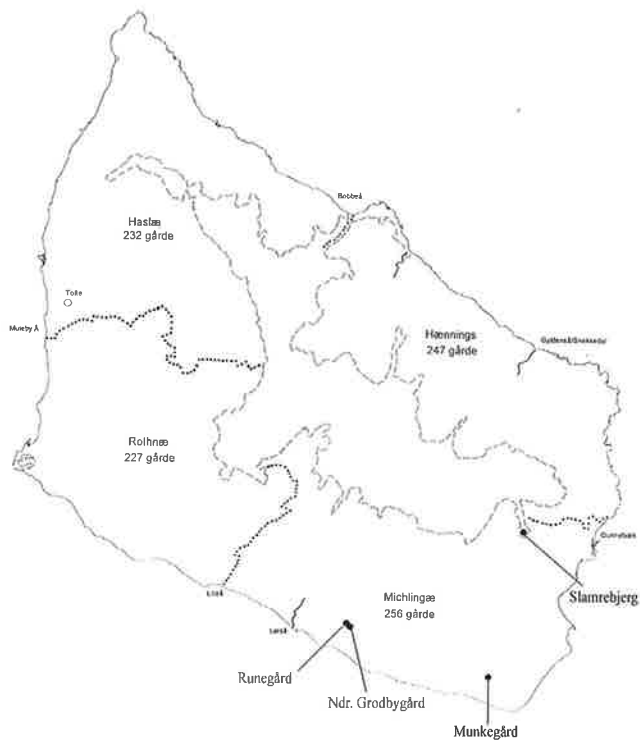


Fig. 1. Early medieval administrative division of Bornholm and the location of the four studied cemeteries. After F.O. Nielsen, 1998, p.14.

formity, where “people enact behaviors they may not otherwise have, often without even knowing why, or even that they are doing so” (Marshall 2002, p. 362), as well as the fact that they do things they otherwise would not or could not do.

Rituals then, including funerary rites, are practices that are reserved to particular events; they are fixed, formalized and based on tradition and common knowledge of proper actions and yet they are subject to change that is partly a consequence of always shifting and dynamic surroundings. Rituals can also be a subject of manipulation and alteration and a powerful tool enabling expression of one’s beliefs and points of view. Due to their formality based on the common mnemonic knowledge of how to execute rites correctly and due to the fact that situations requiring ritual

response lead to the co-presence of those who are touched by these situations, one of the most important outcomes of ritual is the sensation of belonging and bonding with the fellow participants in the ritual.

## Early medieval cemeteries on Bornholm

There are four known and excavated early medieval cemeteries on Bornholm: in Slamrebjerg (Bodilsker parish), Runegård and Nedre Grødbygård (both in Åker parish), and in Munkegård (Poulsker parish) (fig. 1). With exception of Slamrebjerg and partially Munkegård, which were unearthed in the 19th century, the other sites were investigated in the last 20 years and shortly presented in a

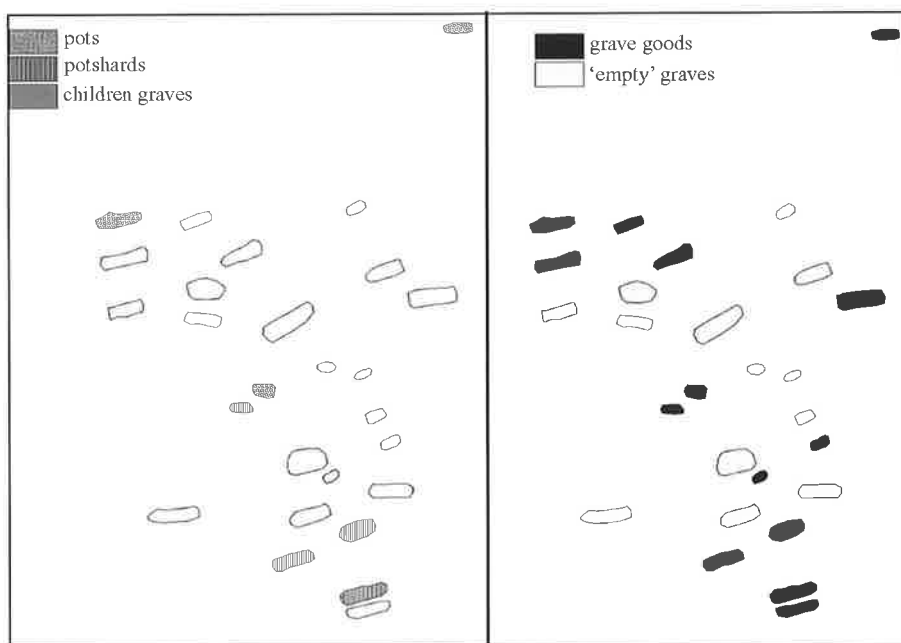


Fig. 2. Plan of the cemetery in Runegård.

series of articles (see Watt 1985; Wagnkilde 1999, 2000, 2001). They are all located in the south-eastern part of Bornholm, in the area that in the early Middle Ages (possibly already in the Viking Age) formed a sort of administrative, legislative and military unit called in medieval historical sources *Michlingæ herred*, which was made up of 256 farms (Nielsen 1998, pp. 13 f., fig. 6). Given that during the excavations of the above-mentioned four cemeteries the graves of about 630 men, women and children were unearthed, we have access to a rich source of information about the ritual practices of more than a quarter of the total population of early medieval *Michlingæ herred*.

The funerary practices observed at these four cemeteries represent an interesting example of a phenomenon often called *transitional stages*, i.e. situations where the longevity of pre-Christian tradition meets with new rules introduced by the church (Boddington 1992; Hadley 2000).

Studies of burial also illuminate differences in ritual behaviour between diverse families or other human groupings, which might have had their roots in contemporary social or political conditions or the existence of different ideas about how one should be buried.

The two oldest burial grounds, located in Runegård and Slamrebjerg and dated to the 10th century, are family or kin cemeteries with only a few burials (27 in Runegård and 6 in Slamrebjerg). In the case of Slamrebjerg, the external features of the graves are similar to those recorded on the burial grounds of an earlier date: all interments were covered by mounds and, as in Viking Age custom, they were encircled by stones. Burials in Runegård were ordered in simple rows and spatially pre-arranged into three separate zones with a grouping of children's graves in the middle (fig. 2). In both cases further changes in practices are observed: the deceased are placed in wooden coffins and lined up with their heads towards the west.

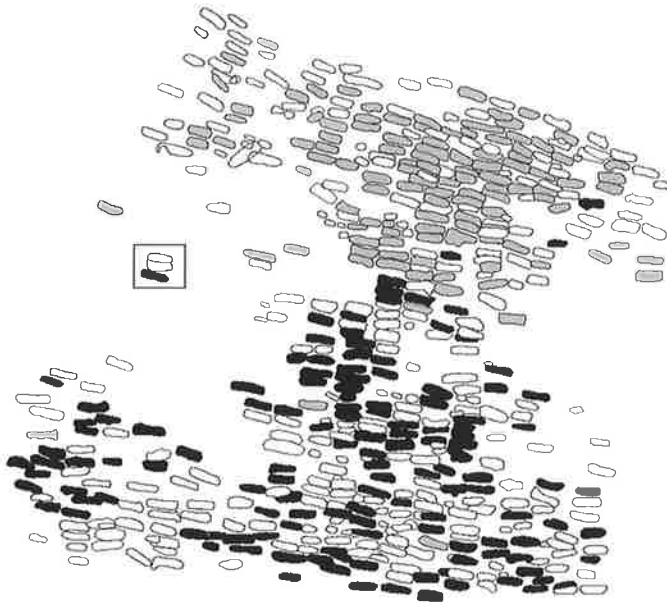


Fig. 3. Plan of the cemetery in Ndr. Grødbygård. Male interments are marked with black color, female with grey. The framed graves in the central-western part of the cemetery are interpreted as possible founders' graves.

Two later burial grounds dated to the 11th century – Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård – show further progress in the adoption of new norms, but interestingly also a relatively strong persistence of what seem to be pre-Christian folk beliefs and traditions. Nonetheless, they are recognized as Christian cemeteries (Kieffer-Olsen 1993; Wagnkilde 1999, 2001; Staecker, 2001). They represent a type of cemetery reflecting, most likely, an early parochial organization on the island, which was based on a unit of about 20 farms (Wagnkilde 1999, p. 14). Most likely both places were enclosed; a possible reflection of a Christian law of *benedictio coemeterii* and *ius funerandi* – a precept to bury in consecrated ground with funeral rights. In both places about half of the interments are placed in the wooden coffins in which the body is arranged in supine position with the head towards the west and, as patterned on some other early medieval cemeteries in Scandinavia, these graveyards are row-grave cemeteries divided into two zones – nor-

thern female and southern male (for further examples see Staecker 2001, pp. 228 ff.) (fig. 3).

What is consistent in all four cemeteries and deviating from the norms observed elsewhere in early medieval Scandinavia is that a considerable number of the deceased were buried in their clothes and wore ornaments instead of being swaddled in shrouds and that they were given grave gifts. Furthermore, in the case of Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård, in the space between graves, contemporaneous pits and patches filled with charcoal, animal bones, horse teeth and potshards were noticed which might indicate practice of ritual meals and commemoration of the deceased and cult of ancestors. Also in a number of graves a ritual of putting objects into the grave filling was observed.

#### *The location of cemeteries in the landscape*

The early medieval Bornholm cemeteries were located in highly visible terrain: on the hills or

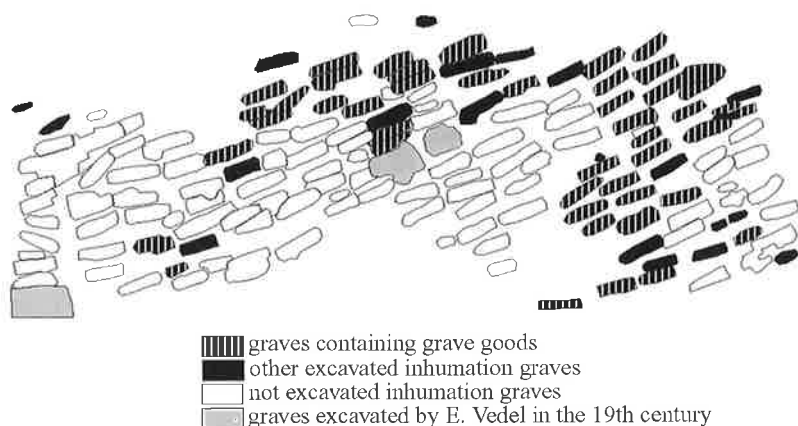


Fig. 4. Plan of the cemetery in Munkegård.

slopes in the vicinity of rivers or streams and in close proximity to the contemporary settlement sites. The places chosen for their location were used in prehistoric times; traces of settlement and mortuary sites dating back mainly to the Bronze Age and the Iron Age were observed. The landscape context of the burial ground in Ndr. Grødbygård is particularly evocative and interesting. It is positioned between contemporary farms, the formerly used kin cemetery in Runegård, and Grødby River, which less than two kilometres away flows into the Baltic Sea. A few hundred metres north of the cemetery the watercourse crosscuts with a road and the place of a presumed bridge is marked with a runic stone. The area surrounding Runegård and Grødbygård is filled with prehistoric monuments.

#### *The attire and grave gifts of the deceased*

In all recognized early medieval cemeteries on Bornholm a considerable number of the deceased were given diverse goods in the form of personal objects (elements of dress, jewellery, etc.) and grave gifts (figs. 2, 4 and 5). The percentage of furnished graves varies between 58% in Runegård, 61% in Ndr. Grødbygård 70% in Munkegård and up to 83% in Slamrebjerg (only one person there was buried

without grave goods). Anthropological analyses determining the sex and age of the buried were conducted only in Grødbygård; in the case of the other three cemeteries bone material was not examined in detail and only children's graves were successfully recognized on the basis of bone fragility and coffin/burial pit size observations.

Since only a fraction of the deceased were anthropologically determined the information about male and female dress is incomplete. Most of the objects recorded in the male graves fall into the category of grave gifts (i.e. objects that were placed with the deceased in the coffin or grave pit). The elements of dress are rather scarce and include belt buckles and single knives attached to a belt, single beads worn as neck ornaments and brooches fastening a type of cloak or shrouds.<sup>1</sup> Women were often wearing beaded necklaces made of glass, silver, amber and clay (other types of beads are scarcer). A few knives were also found attached to their belts along with simple brooches and they decorated their foreheads with beads most likely attached to some form of headbands.<sup>2</sup>

The most common grave gifts are tools and in this category knives strongly predominate.<sup>3</sup> It is somewhat striking that the majority of

knives were given to the deceased and placed by, on or under interred arm, head or chest, rather than being worn attached to a belt. This tendency is visible in all cemeteries. In a large number of graves a single knife constitutes a sole grave gift, in others it is combined with other objects.

Other commonly found grave gifts include whetstones, coins, iron needles, pots and pots-hards. These are thus some of the most obvious objects of everyday use that might have been regarded as absolutely necessary for the journey and existence in the world of the dead and symbolizing the most common human needs and activities.

In the older cemeteries (i.e. in Slamrebjerg and Runegård) it is unusual to find more than one grave gift placed by the body, while in both Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård it is not so uncommon to find burials where up to four different objects were given to the deceased.

There is no relation between grave gifts and the sex or age of the buried. It is interesting to note, however, that children were given pots statistically more often than adults.

#### *Choice of objects worn and put with the deceased and occurrence of Slavic objects*

Studies of the objects found in the graves can provide information about the deceased's costume and the pattern of giving grave gifts. But these analyses also highlight the particularity of the early medieval south-eastern Bornholm communities with regard to some ritual practices including funeral ceremonies (such as dressing of the dead) as well as observances following the deposition of the body in the grave. One of the most visible particularities relates to the occurrence of Slavic objects as a part of the deceased's dress as well as to the treatment and deposition of some of the grave gifts (most evidently pottery) in a way that has close parallels with the customs observed in the Western Slavic area.<sup>4</sup>

The most common objects that originate



Fig. 5. Interments containing grave goods (black) in Ndr. Grødbygård.

from the Slavic region and that were found worn by the buried are silver beads. These beads were made in filigree and granulation techniques and in the area of origin they were used as necklaces or were part of earrings (fig. 6). In Ndr. Grødbygård these beads were recovered from 39 mostly female burials; a single bead was found with a *maturus* man and a few beads in graves of undetermined sex located in the northern (i.e. female) zone. In Munkegård six silver beads were found in five different interments. None of them were registered in Runegård or Slamrebjerg. They were most commonly used as neck decorations but in a few cases they were also found by the temples and between skull bones, which could indicate that they were worn as a head ornament.

Other objects given to the interred and associated with Slavic tradition were knives with bronze-mounted sheaths (fig. 6). They were found in eleven graves in Ndr. Grødbygård and in two graves in Munkegård. The temple rings (a form of headband decoration; fig. 6) are much scarcer. They were registered in two female graves in Ndr. Grødbygård. The bigger temple ring made of bronze was found at a woman's temple, the smaller ring, made of silver, had been turned into a brooch (fig. 6).

Besides objects, there are also traces of cer-

tain rituals related to the placement and treatment of the grave gifts that closely resemble the practices observed by the Western Slavs. Pottery, often broken into shards, was found scattered in the grave pits or single shards were placed by the feet or above the head of the deceased (similar practices were recorded, for instance, at the cemeteries of M\_ynówka in Wolin and Am Hain in Usedom). Similarly to customs observed in some of the cemeteries south of the Baltic Sea, miniature forms of ceramics were noticed. Furthermore, some examples of grave pottery were of lower technical and aesthetic standard than ceramics used in the household. In addition, the use of amulets attract attention; in a single child's grave a bronze bell pendant was found hanging on the infant's neck and a single woman was carrying a capsular amulet, known as *kap-torga*.

In number of graves these objects and phenomena related to Slavic ritual practices coexist.

#### *Human groupings and special and temporal tendencies in the cemeteries*

In the earlier studies concerned with the process of Christianization it is often assumed that there is a clearly visible temporal tendency towards the gradual decrease in the custom of giving grave gifts. This straightforward assumption could be seriously questioned and undermined by the results of analysis of the cemeteries in question, which furthermore leads to an observation that the shift in funerary rituals involving the use of material objects was more complex and problematic than was previously thought. Looking at the spatial distribution of the graves, especially the allocation of equipped and objectless graves in Ndr. Grødbygård, it is striking that the "empty" graves are grouped in the western extremes of the cemetery (fig. 5). This and other extremes are assumed to be younger than the middle zone of the site, which was most likely the starting point for the gravey-

ard. Hence, considering this factor alone one could draw conclusions about the temporal evolution of ritual: from the custom of giving grave goods to the cessation of this custom. However, other observations and analyses conducted at Bornholm cemeteries reveal a contrasting and more complicated picture. Generally, the interred on the older cemeteries (i.e. Slamrebjerg and Runegård) were given fewer grave gifts than those buried in the younger burial grounds (Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård). In the completely excavated cemetery in Ndr. Grødbygård graves are arranged in rows, although in a few places this neat arrangement is disturbed and interments overlap and cluster. This clustering and stratigraphical crosscutting allow the identification of temporal and spatial similarities and differences in the way the buried were dressed and kitted. Six clusters in the female zone where stratigraphical relations between at least four burials were possible to discern and five clusters in the male zone where stratigraphical relations between at least three interments were detected were chosen for analysis. It appears that only in the case of some of the groupings is it possible to notice a gradual decrease of the custom of giving grave goods. This tendency is clearer in the case of the clusters in the northern, i.e. female zone, of the cemetery. However there are also groupings within the female zone that do not show this propensity (the amount of grave goods placed with the deceased is more or less constant throughout the time) or prove quite the opposite; some of the older graves are "poorer" than the younger ones. The analysis of the clusters in the male zone showed that either all the men who were buried in the same grouping were given the exact same or very similar grave goods (three clusters) or the men in the stratigraphically younger graves were given more grave goods than those who were buried earlier. None of the analysed clusters showed any tendency to a reduction in grave goods. Furthermore, in analysing pairs of stratigraph-



hically layered burials one can notice that there are approximately as many younger unequipped graves succeeding older equipped ones as unequipped burials preceding equipped ones. Hence a conclusion can be reached that there is no general tendency to a decrease in the number of grave goods, at least in the cluster of male graves. This propensity is more pronounced in some of the female grave groupings (although not in all of them) where changes in attire also often occurred. Unfortunately, in most cases, it is not possible to accurately date the individual graves in each cluster and necessary reliance on relative chronology makes it difficult to grasp the pace of changes. The excavator of the cemetery, Hanne Wagnkilde, estimated that Grødbygård was used for a duration of about 100 years (Wagnkilde 1999, p. 14), which means that the cemetery could have been used by up to 5–6 generations. How long different families or groupings kept the rituals in unchanged form and when exactly new forms of expression were introduced is unfortunately difficult to pinpoint with accuracy.

Stratigraphical analyses also revealed another interesting phenomena. In the case of three female groupings there were obvious similarities in the deceased's dress and grave gifts or in the principle of choice of goods. In one grouping consisting of five graves there were similarities between a few interments but inconsistencies with the others and in two clusters there were no observable similarities in the pattern of grave goods. Comparable propensities were noticed in the male zone, where in three clusters the exact same or similar grave goods were found and in the remaining two no parallels were noticed.

Groupings of another type are visible in the small kin cemetery in Runegård. The graves that contain potshards are clustered in the southern part of cemetery, while the graves with complete pots are in the northern part. Children's graves are located in the middle zone of the cemetery (fig. 2).

The existence of such clusters and overlapping of interments where buried are dressed and given similar objects raises the question of the identity of the deceased and the participants of the funeral ceremony. These groupings do not seem to be random and the will to be buried next to each other might have been dictated by the relations based on kin associations or sharing of common identity by the members of these communities. One could also make an assumption that while some families or human groupings were more conservative and continued to place grave gifts and dress their deceased in accordance with once learnt norms, or interpreted Christian ideals in such way that allowed them to proceed with certain rituals, the others might have adopted new customs more quickly. This is probably why we receive two contrasting pictures from the spatial analysis of Ndr. Grødbygård cemetery. On one hand there are clusters of graves representing unchanged or gradually changing tradition with regard to dress and grave gifts, while on the other hand there are graves that are located in the extremes of the cemetery, which are most likely the youngest, and tend to be less equipped or "empty".

*Bornholm's early medieval cemeteries – combining theory with empirical data*

The results of the analysis of the rituals in which the communities of south-eastern Bornholm engaged shed light on a variety of ritual responses, which were most likely grounded in at least two independent phenomena experienced by these communities. Firstly they reveal some of the circumstances and reactions to the changing political and social landscape, one dimension of which was the process of Christianization and strengthening hitherto rather weak ties with the Danish realm, leading to a shift in social relations. In these settings manipulation of funerary rituals proved to be a powerful tool of tacit communication of legitimate order. Secondly, they

inform about migration and the immigrants' use of material culture.

The overlapping of these two processes in time and space caused certain social and cultural tensions, which led to redefinition of identity and shifts in practices. One may expect that in such circumstances previously functioning social and cultural norms, the unquestioned order of things and all that was taken for granted becomes revealed as subjective (e.g. Bourdieu 2000). This in turn leads to renegotiation and shift in ritual and quotidian practices.

### *Christianization and change in political landscape*

Written sources are inconsistent with regard to the official conversion of Bornholm. According to Adam of Bremen, Eginu the pious bishop of Lund was the one who converted the Bornholmers to Christianity. Eginu's mission on the island took place some time between 1060 and 1070 AD, and if we can trust Adam's words, the bishop convinced the locals to destroy their pagan gods statues, build churches and free the numerous slaves that were held on the island (Nielsen 1988, p. 16). But Eginu was neither the only nor the first missionary who set foot on Bornholm. Before him Henry, former bishop of Orkneys and subordinate to the English church, was sent to do missionary duties among the Bornholmers. Adam, who was representing the interests of the Archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen, writes that Henry was "unchristian" and continues in a bitter tone that the bishop drank and ate so much that he finally burst (Wagnkilde 1999, p. 9).

It is hard to measure how successful or unsuccessful the undertakings of both missionaries were. It is however possible to observe that on one hand some elements of the Christian ideology were known and to some degree accepted before Eginu's assignment. On the other hand, the adherence to traditional beliefs and ignorance of Christian values survi-

ved his mission. The latter becomes clear in the deeds of "Blod-Egil". He was a royal bailiff in the reign of Canute the Holy (1080–86) and famous for his cruelty as leader of a group of pirates, threatening the eastern waters of the Baltic Sea. He refused to convert and to refrain from his wicked activities, for which he was put to death by the king.

Written sources only give glimpses of what happened on the island at the beginning of the 11th century, but these clues might indicate that this period brought some significant political and social transformations leading to the reorganization of the administrative system (introduction of the parochial system) and the increase of new claims of power. The most complete account of this subject given by Adam of Bremen might have exaggerated the Bornholmers' late meeting with Christianity, nonetheless the chronicler's words are an important indication that from the second half of the 11th century onwards, the process of strengthening ties with the Danish kingdom and the institutionalization of the Church started to be formalized.

Archaeological studies can also contribute to the understanding of this time, not least by scrutinizing the complex of Runegård and Grødbygård with their farms, cemeteries, reuse of ancient landscape and new highly visible installations around it. The exact relationship between Runegård and Grødbygård is not certain, but we can assume that the owners of both farms were Christians choosing the strategy of support for the new order. The Runegård holders could afford to establish a cemetery for the farm inhabitants adjoining the settlement. The power of their successors stretched even further; they were able to found a large burial ground, most likely build a church,<sup>5</sup> and ordered the inhabitants of neighbouring farms to bury their deceased at the cemetery. The location of Ndr. Grødbygård graveyard is evocative: it is exposed in the landscape, near the crossing of a navigable river with an established land route

marked with a runic stone, in a place that has been used almost continuously from early pre-historic times. The conscious choice of this setting might have been a viable form of expression of power for the local elite – the founders of the cemetery – who, as believed by excavators, chose to be buried in a secluded zone of the graveyard (fig. 3). It was this type of status manifestation that Christianity could offer and a feasible alternative to lavish burial.

However, the analysis of the burial rituals practised by the communities using this graveyard expose some other interesting behaviour. What is striking is the amount of objects that are found deposited with some of the deceased as well as the fact that the number and variety of grave goods is much higher in the interments at younger cemeteries (Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård) than in the older ones. Some of the deceased interred in Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård were offered more than two different grave gifts; some women were buried with various pieces of jewellery of silver and more sporadically of gold and precious stones. Some of these burials are grouped very close to each other, which could be an indication of the existence of family or other types of bonds, although, on the other hand, burials with exactly the same elements of dress and grave gifts tend to be more spatially diffused.

There could be a banal explanation for the occurrence of at least jewellery and some tools in these graves. They might be the deceased's belongings, favourite objects or parts of the costume that he/she or the mourners wished to bury with the body. However, even if they were placed unconsciously and for such prosaic reasons, it is hard to imagine that these objects did not evoke memories and associations, and taking into consideration the contemporary tense settings they probably led to ontological questions about selfhood and identity. Therefore, the reason behind the diversity of ritual responses must be sought in other circumstances grounded in ideology and

social/cultural realities.

Some archaeologists believe that burial rituals were primarily social manipulations and that transformations in funerary display were determined by changes in social structure rather than by religious beliefs, whether "pagan" or Christian (Hadley 2000, p. 159). Nonetheless, it should be stressed that customary rules and beliefs were important ingredients of ritual, and the significance of the acceptance of Christianity should not be downplayed. It not only caused changes in the ceremonies associated with burial, but it also offered new settings and new sets of symbols through which social status could continue to be expressed. In the same vein, rituals continued to be a channel of expression for those who disagreed with the official line of politics or for those who simply continued to engage in ceremonies they once learned and regarded as the only proper way to deal with bereavement and to commemorate the deceased.

Early medieval Bornholm was in a stage of political development that undoubtedly caused some social anxiety, which was mirrored in the human practices. The rising elite strategically chose to question the functioning norms and practices and aimed at re-establishing arbitrary order through the creation of a new set of rules and practices. These in turn were introduced into funerary rituals where the superiority of the Christian ceremony was established.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the religious beliefs of the buried and the mourners on the basis of the funerary practices. Due to the complexity of this subject, which would require a separate study, I will briefly concentrate only on some aspects of religion and funeral that are important for the present study. Although Bornholm cemeteries lack traces of enclosures or early church or chapel buildings (which are typically associated with Christian cemeteries), the authors who discussed these sites, particularly the one in Ndr. Grødbygård, considered it as a

Christian necropolis (Kieffer-Olsen 1993; Wagnkilde 1999, 2001; Staecker, 2001). This assumption was primarily based on the other indicators, such as the orientation and positioning of the bodies, the high percentage of infant burials and sex division into northern female and southern male zones. Does it mean that all the buried and the mourners who used the cemeteries considered themselves Christians? This is probably an unanswerable question, which leaves broad scope for speculation. For some islanders, conversion in its early stage might have had very minimal meaning and impact on ritual behaviour; they continued to conduct the same rituals and routines and they used early Christian cemeteries in a manner similar to the earlier communal burial grounds existing on Bornholm before Christianization. The others might have considered themselves as Christians. However, early Christianity was heterogeneous, which means that a single set of practices did not exist and Christian eschatological ideas could have been interpreted in various ways. One must bear in mind that the understanding of Christian preaching and material expressions of beliefs might have differed considerably between individuals and groups. In the early phases of conversion, when the church organization was not yet fully established and when priests and church buildings sporadically dotted the landscape, access to the missionaries, as teachers and ritual experts, was probably uneven. By the same token the understanding of Christian eschatology was not universal and one has to consider that contemporary early Christian communities living on Bornholm might have interpreted these rules (what was supposed to be done in the circumstances of death and funerals) in various ways. It is also probable that certain ideas and rituals related to Christian ideology were understood and accepted more quickly than the others due to their similarities to pre-Christian ideas or their particular evocativeness or ideological/imaginary strength. One

such idea is the motif of a soul journey present in both pre-Christian and Christian traditions. What happens during such a journey might have been understood differently; hence the grave goods so frequently found in the burials and placed to accommodate the transition to another world might not necessarily bear witness to lingering paganism. Instead they might reflect an interpretation of the Christian idea of soul passage (for a similar conclusion, see Andersson 2004).

On the other hand, it is also plausible to think that the objects found in the grave and rituals surrounding their choice and placement were the result of a different stance and the outcome of different social strategies. Certainly not everybody on the island approved and followed new rules introduced by those who officially ruled. Those who stood in opposition could have aimed at reinstating the previous rituals and practices. In this situation manipulation of rituals most likely took place through tacit articulation of resistance, through the use of material culture and by making references to the past.

Both of these processes then – the introduction of new ideology and setting new norms by the elite, and the attempts to reinstate the old order by those in opposition – found expression in the ritual practices and manipulation of tradition through the deployment of memory and forgetfulness. However each of the groups chose different media to express their attitude. The traditionalist, standing in conscious or unconscious opposition, could chose viable and affordable forms of display based on the use of rituals and material culture during funeral ceremonies at home and at the cemetery. This included engagement with multi-staged ceremonies at the cemetery: the custom of giving excessive grave gifts, putting objects into the grave filling and participation in commemorative meals. Ritual conduct and the selection of objects deposited with the deceased were purposefully chosen. In many graves, especially female ones, silver coins and

silver beads were found together with other elements of dress and other pieces of grave gifts. Furthermore, in a few other interments exclusive pieces of jewellery were registered, such as gilt brooches or golden and semi-precious stone beads. The male graves are generally less abundant in objects, although in a few of them silver hoards and single coins were registered and here also animal bones and horse teeth (placed as a grave gift or cast in the filling) occurred more frequently than in the female burials. The use of silver might have had a symbolic meaning for members of the old elite. Artefacts, in this case fragmented coins and silver beads, could evoke memories not only through their form but also through their symbolic, metaphorical and biographical associations with the deceased and his or her past. Fragmented silver was a legal tender circulating between tradesmen. Silver and coins were also a materialization of magical luck. Some of the individuals buried in Ndr. Grødbygård might have been the ones who previously participated in the trade thus had access to silver. In the moment of death and

funerals mourners could have chosen to refer to this particular (successful) aspects of the deceased past and through the use of material objects wished to guarantee good fortune in the afterlife. They also aimed at emphasizing the facets that mattered to the deceased or to the bereaved. In this case references were made to the idealized order and to the past rather than to the real and contemporary status quo.

The lavish burials and performative, multi-staged ritual ceremonies were most likely aimed at a local audience. These practices were by their very nature temporary, although they still had a bonding and empowering effect on their participants. By contrast, the elite could afford and invest in above-ground displays involving manipulation of the landscape through the establishment of the cemetery adjoining the settlement and most likely by founding a church. This form of demonstration being a feasible alternative to the lavish burials had a much more durable role to play and might have been aimed at distant peers (Hadley 2000).

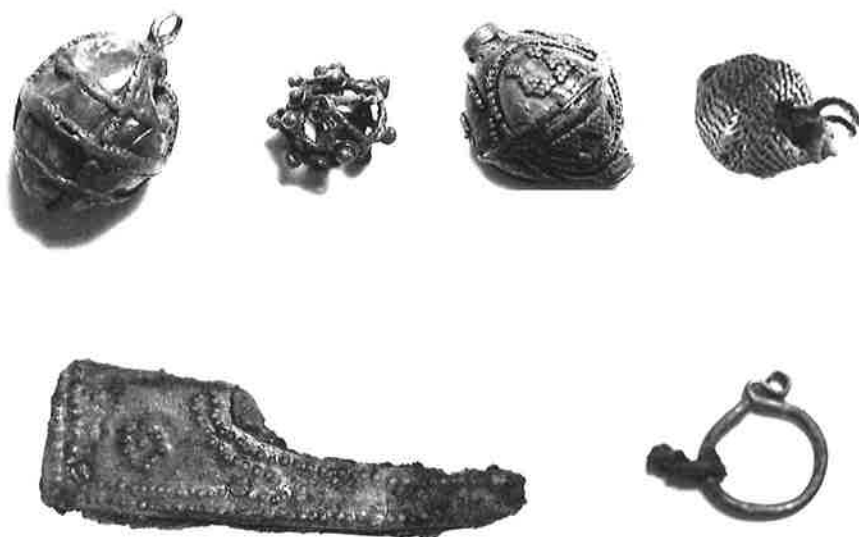


Fig. 6. Examples of Slavic objects found in Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård. From upper left: silver bead-pendant; silver openwork bead from a basket-shaped earring (re-used as a necklace bead); silver bead decorated with granulation from a necklace; silver round, filigree bead from an earring turned into a necklace bead; bronze knife sheath mounting; silver temple ring turned into a brooch. Photo: author.

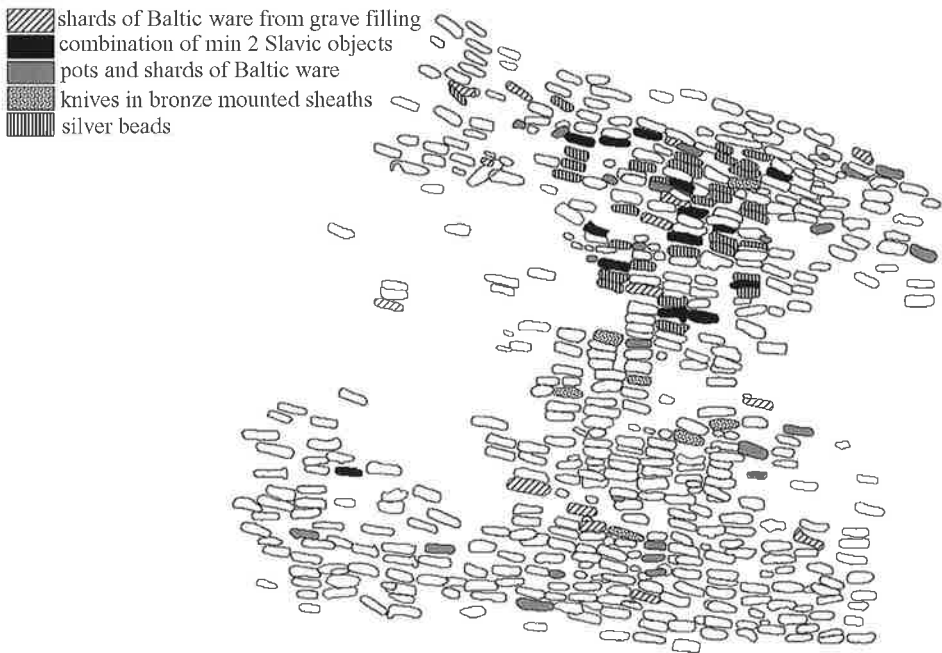


Fig. 7. Objects and rituals associated with Slavic tradition observed on Ndr. Grødbygård cemetery.

### *Slavic immigrants*

Another phenomenon that the analysis of the Bornholm cemeteries reveals is the particularity in selection of the objects found worn and given to some of the deceased. As mentioned before, a large number of the interred in these cemeteries were decorated with ornaments and given grave gifts. There is a group of burials where the choice of the objects and the way they were treated and placed inside the graves comes as somewhat of a surprise. It does not have any clear relation to the earlier funerary rites practised on Bornholm; it shows instead analogies with the rituals performed by Western Slavs in their homelands south of the Baltic Sea.

On the single-farm cemetery in Runegård there is a clear pattern of grouping of the graves: child interments (with two exceptions) are placed in the middle of the cemetery, interments where the buried were given potshards of Baltic ware are located in the southern part of the site and other adults' graves (i.e. those

who were not given potshards) are placed in the northern zone of the burial ground (fig. 2). This zoning and differences in ritual practice at least with regard to the pottery might be an indication of various habitual norms in ritual, and thus various identities among Runegård inhabitants. Differences in the use of pottery in funerary ceremonies are also visible in the case of two other cemeteries (Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård), although they lack the clear zoning observed in Runegård.

Other elements pointing towards Western Slavic tradition are objects worn or given to the deceased, such as knives in bronze-mounted sheaths, single finds of amulet pendants, temple rings and silver beads found mainly in the female graves (fig. 6). In some graves these objects co-occur with each other, in others only single finds of this type were deposited. Some of the pieces of jewellery bear clear signs of a change of function (fig. 6): earring beads are found worn on the neck, a temple ring was turned into a brooch, beads that were origi-

nally a part of necklaces were found in the head area. Such “incorrect” use of this jewellery might be a sign of appropriation of the foreign elements into a local dress, although other explanations are also possible.

Elements of foreign material culture can be adopted and implemented. For this reason it is not impossible to envisage that silver beads were incorporated into the local female dress, especially since they were known on the island, albeit in a different context, for some time. Such adoption or manipulation of material objects could even have had its meaning in demonstrating opposition in the uneasy times. As suggested earlier, in such circumstances these objects could have been placed for their material value (they were made of silver) and associated with trade activities and participation in exchange.

On the other hand, there might be another explanation (but not excluding the previous one) for the appearance of these artefacts. The choice of the jewellery might have been a result of conscious decisions of the deceased (who might have used it while still alive) and the participants in the funeral. These objects could have served as identity markers loaded with meaning, as did the ornaments (beaded necklaces, knife sheaths and headband jewellery), which were used in the same way as in the areas they originated from. The latter feature – head decoration – is of particular interest. In Ndr. Grødbygård and Munkegård a number of beads that were originally a part of earrings were found during the cleansing of the crania or by the women’s head. The custom of head or ear decoration was not previously recognized in southern Scandinavia while it was rather common in Slavic areas, where women commonly wore head ornaments in the form of a headband with temple rings and earrings attached to it. To recognize which bead belongs to a necklace and which to an earring and to use them “properly” requires certain practical knowledge. The same applies to the previously mentioned symbolic use of

pottery. Could the local inhabitants of the island acquire such knowledge? Could they learn and adopt diverse ways of pottery treatment undoubtedly charged with symbolic meanings, or could they invent these rituals? Are we witnessing burials of Slavic settlers, or signs of adoption and invention of material culture and funerary rituals, or both? Is it too much of a stretch to interpret the foreign object as a sign of immigrants in this context?

To regard single examples of foreign material objects as indicators of immigration would be too limited if not completely unacceptable, especially in a society that already adopted some technological and stylistic elements springing from the same foreign tradition.<sup>6</sup> I am aware of the possibility of adoption and giving a new symbolic value to these objects (see the earlier explanation of the occurrence of the silver beads), but I would argue that at least some of the graves in which these foreign objects were recorded should be seen as being of Slavic immigrants.

As mentioned earlier, it is often not only the occurrence of single elements of material culture but whole sets including material objects and the way these were treated and deposited which, in my opinion, allows such a conclusion (fig. 7).

Nevertheless the rituals and selection of objects given to the deceased is similar but not identical to that practised in the Western Slavic territory. This could be explained partly by the limited access to certain elements of material culture and the fact that immigrants usually carry a simplified version of the culture (Anthony 1998, p. 26) and partly by the fact that the enactment and proceedings of ritual practices rely on memory, which is a reconstructive interpretation of the past (Antze & Lambek 1996). This is especially visible in the case of female silver jewellery. Women in Slavic areas were very rarely kitted with silver beads or earrings and instead temple rings – a form of head decoration – were frequently found worn by the interred. In con-

trast, on Bornholm the situation is reversed; temple rings occur in only two burials in Ndr. Grødbygård while beads were worn by about 8% (44 interments) of females in two of the studied cemeteries. The only Western Slavic area where a large number of silver ornaments were recovered from the grave context is the territory of the Polabian Serbs (between the Elbe, Oder and Saale, today's province of Lausitz in eastern Germany) (Kocka-Krenz 1993, map 15 ff.). From the first half of the 10th century onwards this area witnessed increasing German expansion. Confrontations of this sort and situations of co-habitation (forced or willing) might be precisely the kind of circumstances when identities were manifested more strongly with the use of material culture.

These situations of culture contact lead to the realization about other possible choices and other existing patterns or norms. Thus they may lead to recognition of the arbitrariness of one's own values and the non-exclusiveness of one's own set of practices and responses. This in turn may lead to diverse reactions, spanning from assimilation through acceptance of the foreign norms and customs, to rejection of these norms and conservative maintenance of old practices. These diverse reactions undoubtedly recognized the importance of dress and the body in the negotiation and transmission of identity. How to move, carry, and dress the body is a subject of socially acquired knowledge. This *body hexis*, using Bourdieu's term, is a central means by which identities become somatically informed and grounded (Bourdieu 2000, p. 87 f.; 93 f.). It is a form of body memory. In the situation of prolonged culture contact, such as immigration and co-habitation with members of other groups, dress practices are imbued with intentionality because of the social climate of this situation. In such circumstances individuals embodying certain habitual practices are put vis-à-vis the other set of practices and are forced to comment and react. All the bodily

norms that were formerly self-evident and unquestioned (because they were never or rarely put against a different pattern) now encounter a difference, which cannot be ignored. Reactions might span from the abandonment of previous norms concerning the way of presenting the body to realization that difference in dress can be purposefully used to distinguish self from the others. These strategies are not equally visible in archaeological material. It is much easier to trace immigrants who used traditional dress to communicate self and identity grounded in the past. The silver beads, temple rings, amulets and knives in the mounted sheaths were a visual measure of difference tenaciously employed in ritual situations. Objects then could have been exploited for their specific cultural associations and as such used by the deceased (while still alive) or by mourners to highlight these aspects of self and the group that mattered and were regarded as important to emphasize.

As pointed out earlier, in the circumstances of immigration and co-habitation, values, habitual responses and solutions are exposed as partial and only some of the many possible ones, which may lead to diverse reactions. Regardless of the chosen strategy (assimilation or traditionalism), practices – in this case ritual actions – will most likely deviate from ceremonies observed and socially learned before immigration. It is partly due to the fact that performance of the rituals is based on the memory and memories are never simply records of the past but rather a kind of interpretative reconstructions. Furthermore, new rituals and ways of expression could have developed and become recognized as proper as societies changed. Changes in the conduct of daily and ritual practices might have been to a degree unavoidable due to the difference in settings and different experience of the immigrants and those who were left behind. On the other hand, the ritual ceremonies might have been purposefully steered. In this intentionally or unconsciously modified form, the rituals



functioned as long as the participants recognized them as a proper way of dealing with the trauma. This recognition of what is proper, the familiarity of actions strengthened the feeling of belonging together. Joint participation had cathartic qualities; not only the emotions of loss were released through the rituals but through the shared knowledge of how to proceed, the feeling of identity among the mourners became stronger and allowed them to go on.

The analysis of the cemeteries builds a ground for consideration of possible changes in the ritual behaviour of immigrants. In Runegård graves with potshards of Baltic ware, i.e. graves of possible immigrants, are grouped in the southernmost part of the graveyard. This very clear zoning is lacking at the cemetery in Ndr. Grødbygård, although one reason why it might be less apparent is due to the size and character of this cemetery, which was used by several farms. In Grødbygård in the female zone interments where a few Slavic objects or practices were combined with each other tend to be grouped in the centre, i.e. in most likely the oldest part of this zone. The graves located towards the extremes of the northern zone show a propensity to changes in the dress, and the sole element that could be with some certainty associated with immigrants are potshards and maybe pots placed with the deceased. For the same reason it is interesting to study clustered graves with foreign objects and traces of foreign rituals. One such cluster is made up of four female graves located in the central part of the northern zone of the cemetery (graves 426–429). In the three overlapping graves women were given almost exact sets of ornaments and gifts consisting of beaded necklaces, including the same type of silver beads in two graves, knives (one in a mounted sheath) and coins. In another grouping of five female graves elements of dress and grave gifts differ in every interment, yet in four of them there is at least one trait pointing towards Slavic tradition – temple ring, silver

beads, potshards of Baltic ware. In yet another grouping, which lacks a stratigraphical relationship, all women buried next to each other were given knives and beaded necklaces or at least single beads, and one of them was additionally given a pot and two amulets – an animal tooth and capsular pendant called a *kaptorga*.

Some of the above-mentioned and other clusters, in the context of which foreign objects and practices were recorded, show a rather static tendency in the choice of objects and their treatment, or at least in the principle of these practices, while the others show a propensity to rather quick temporal changes in ceremonies, especially with regard to dress. If the Slavic silver jewellery was indeed an identity signifier and not an element that was adopted by local women, this change in dress and rituals overall could have been caused by gradual assimilation and/or simply adoption of Christian forms of expression as well as shifts in identity and self-image.

## Conclusions

The studies of ritual or, strictly speaking, material remains of ritual, inform about two overlapping processes that to various degrees influenced the social, political and cultural landscape of early medieval Bornholm. One was the migration or migrations of Slavic groups that settled on the island, the other was the strengthening of ties and control over the island by the Danish kingdom, through the introduction of Christianization, new administrative divisions and a shifting constellation of power. Those processes were not without an effect on human practices and led to shifts in the conduct of activities. These changes are particularly strongly reflected in ritual behaviour. As pointed out earlier, rituals share some common traits with other human actions and yet they are special actions partly due to the fact that they are entangled and a result of both ideology and social manipulations and

partly due to their formality, fixity and “demand” to be exercised according to exactly prescribed rules. This knowledge and memory of how to proceed in a situation requiring ritual response and coming together has an important outcome in participants’ feeling of belonging with each other. I argue that this situation was particularly important for the immigrants. They could play out the difference, boost their feeling of identity, help to awake the memories allowing them to do things, which otherwise they might have not been able to do. Memory of the past and attempts to reinstate old *doxic* norms might have been a viable choice for some other islanders. I argue that through rituals and the manipulation of the material culture references to the past and the idealized state of things were made. Participation in such rituals had an effect not only on the participants but also on onlookers.

There is also another strategy visible: with the introduction of Christianity and Christian norms into rituals, the local elite tried to reinforce a new order. They could afford a different way of identity marking and sought references to the present rather than to the past. The introduction of Christianity did not mean unification of ritual responses. The new ideas and rules could have been interpreted differently by different individuals and groups and could have been largely influenced by the access to the preaching and social position within community. Hence the presence of the grave goods and ornaments gets an alternative explanation, as it could be associated not with overt resistance but rather with different and simultaneously functioning interpretations of Christian eschatological dogmas and rites. As repeatedly pointed out, the funerals and rituals associated with them were steered by religious or ideological beliefs as much as by social networks and the position of the deceased and mourners. Hence the message sent by the bereaved (through engagement in ritual) could have had multiple but concurring meanings

(e.g. “we are Christians but we also identify ourselves with a particular group”).

One could ask how such an array of ritualized expression could be pursued without stronger or more defined control of those who tried to introduce new norms. According to Bell, ritualization is not a matter of conveying beliefs or imposing a dominant ideology. Because the ritual symbols and meaning are as a rule undefined, flexible and often unexplainable, it is hardly possible to instil fixed ideas. “Ritualized practices, of necessity, require the external consent of participants while simultaneously tolerating a fair degree of internal resistance. As such they do not function as an instrument of heavy-handed social control” (Bell 1992, p. 221). She continues that due to the mechanisms of ritualization and its authority ritual ceremonies can effectively build and display a sense of community without erasing the autonomy of individuals or groups (Bell 1992, p. 222) This is another reason why the differences in identities (ethnic, cultural, social, etc.) are more visible in the material remains of ritual situation. Identities found an easier way of expression in the circumstances requiring ritual response.

The interpretation of ritual responses of the communities of the south-eastern Bornholm sketched above might seem complicated and ambiguous for a reader. I feel, however, that to propose a single and straightforward interpretation of ritual practices that the members of this community engaged with would be unfair if not improper or even impossible. The complexity of the contemporary situation imposed various reactions and strategies that in their turn found their outlet in various ritual responses.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Emma Bentz and Fredrik Ekengren for constructive comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

## Notes

- 1 Belt buckles were found in four interments, knives in seven, single beads in three and brooches in single burial.
- 2 Beaded necklaces were found worn by 32 women, knives by 26 women, brooches by 21 women and head decorations were found in seven interments.
- 3 Grodbygård – 160 knives, Munkegård – 32 knives, Runegård – 7 knives, Slamrebjerg – 5 knives.
- 4 I.e. the territory east of the Elbe and west of the Vistula and Bug. The closest parallels, however, are found in the cemeteries of the coastal area (east and west of Oder estuary) and in the area of today's province of Great Poland.
- 5 Although remains of a church were not recovered during excavations, Wagnkilde (1999, 2001) and Staecker (2001) conclude about the possible existence of a church in Ndr. Grødbygård cemetery.
- 6 An example is pottery, Baltic ware, which replaced the hand-made local pottery some time at the beginning of the 11th century.

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