

# Life and cult of Cnut the Holy

The first royal saint of Denmark

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# King Cnut's donation letter and settlement structure in Denmark, 1085 – new perspectives on an old document

By Jesper Hansen

One of the most important sources to the history of medieval Denmark is the donation letter of Cnut IV, dated 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1085 and signed in Lund (fig. 1). This letter is a public affirmation of the royal gifts

donated to the Church of St Laurentius, the cathedral church in Lund, and it represents the first written record of rural administration and fiscal rights in Denmark (Latin text, appendix 1).

## Cnut's donation letter to the church in Lund (Dipl. Dan 1.2:21)

In the name of the indivisible Trinity, father, son and Holy Ghost, we desire it to be known to everyone in the Christian faith, how I, Cnut IV, son of king [Svend] Magnus, after having received the kingdom as my paternal inheritance, gave a dowry to the Church of the Holy Laurentius – which is situated in Lund – even though it is not yet completed, so that it can forever be a bride to the lamb that carries the sins of the world, holy for the holy, immaculate for the immaculate, dignified for the dignified. And we have disclosed what, or of what kind, this bridal gift will be, before these witnesses: The bishops Rikwal, Svend and Sigvard; Earl Håkon; the priests Arnold, Theoderic, Henrik and Gottskalk; the stallars Alle, Håkon, Peter, Svend, Asser Håkonson. We desire to establish [this gift], fixed and for all eternity, with God as protector. This is, then, the land which Æpi Thorbjørnson in Lund gave in reparation for his peace. In southern Uppåkra [Lilla Uppåkra], four and a half hides [1 *mansus* = ca. 1 hide]. In the other Uppåkra, the same number of hides. In Herrestad, eight hides. In

Skälshög, two hides. In Flädie, five and a half hides which Håkon gave to the king. In Hilleshög, half a hide. In Håstad, one hide. In Gärd. In Venestad, one hide. In Skättilljunga, half a hide. In Sövestad, half a hide which Skore paid for his peace. And half a hide in Karlaby which the same Scora gave for his peace to the king. In Brönnestev, half a hide which the king redeemed from Thorgisl Gunstenson. In Gudesbo [Göinge]. In Sandby, one hide. In Zealand. In Ramsø Hundred [modern Danish: *Herred*] in Øm, two hides. In Sømme Hundred in Tjæreby, two hides. In Tune Hundred in Winningawe, two hides. In Horns Hundred in Skuldelev, one hide. In Odense [or Onsved], one hide. In Lower Smørum [Smørumnedre], two hides. In Lynge Hundred in Børstingerød, two hides. In Jørlunde Hundred in Tollerup, one hide. In Skenkelsø, one hide. On the island of Amager. In Western Sundby [Sundbyvester], five [hides]. In Brundby, three hides. Of the money given each year from the plots in Lomma, three marks. Of the same money in Helsingborg, three marks. From the plots in Lund, twenty marks and one. If any powerful man, of noble stock or not of noble stock, born or not yet born, puffed up by insolent boldness, desires to violate

this agreed-upon decree against the command of holy religion, he is to be excommunicated upon the Return of our Lord and to be consigned to eternal punishment where worms never die and fire is never extinguished. Let his table before him be for him a snare, a retribution, and a stumbling block, with those who said to the Lord God, go away from us, we have no desire to know your ways. But that which pertains to the king's justice in this aforementioned region, of whatever cause it be, shall be put before the priest and the rest of the brothers serving God in this place, except three offenses. If someone is outlawed he must buy peace from the king [by which that [offense] is repaired], but his wealth is taken by the priest and the brothers. If he neglects a call for military service [*leding*], he must make reparations to the king. Horses for the [royal] carriages need not be given unless the king himself comes. Set down in Lund on the twelfth kalends of June [May 21] in the year of Our Lord's incarnation 1085 in the 8<sup>th</sup> indiction, the 22<sup>nd</sup> epact, and the second concurrent, in the fifth year of the lord King Cnut. The aforementioned bishops were present and confirmed it in the Maker, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever and ever. Amen.

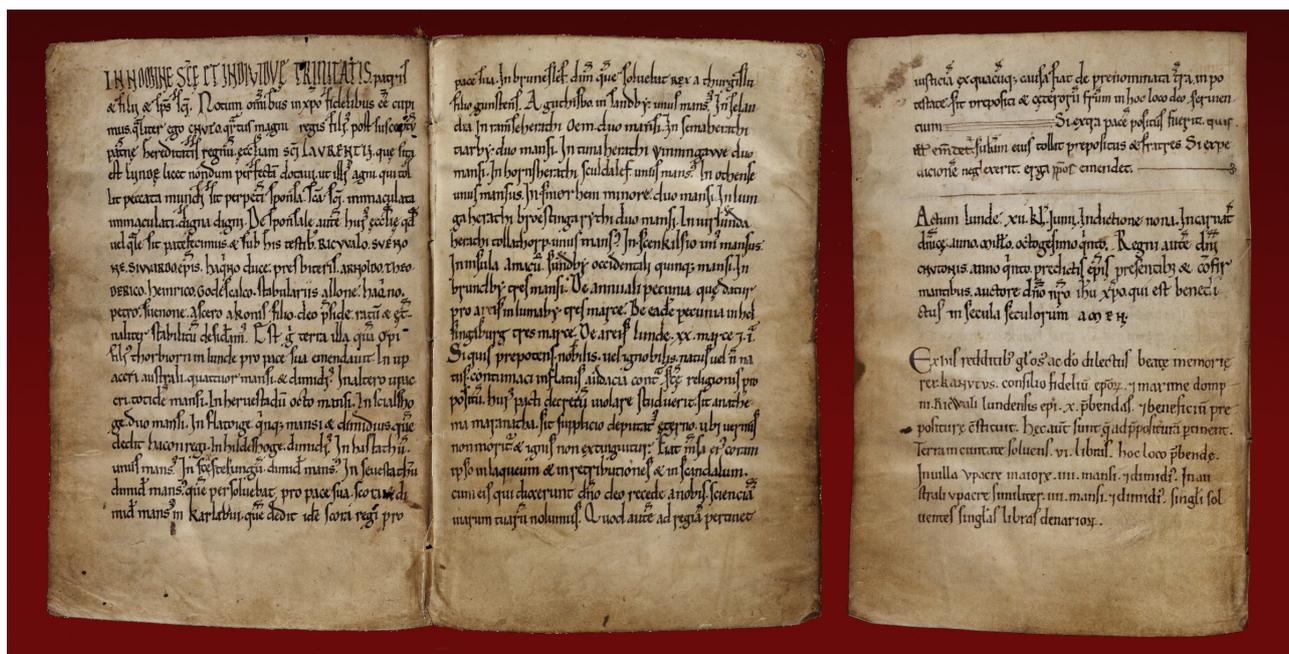


Fig. 1: Transcript of King Cnut's donation letter of 1085 in *Necrologium Lundense*, a collection of names and documents relevant to Lund cathedral's history, which is dated no later than 30th of June, 1123 (Lunds Universitetsbibliotek, ALVIN, edited by Peter Birch).

Details pertaining to the organization of Danish settlements that are reflected in the document can be studied in tandem with the available archaeological data of that period, and vice versa. Due to the scarcity of sources from the period in question, an interpretation of the document within a framework of settlement history – with a focus on administrative, organizational and judicial elements – is therefore best conducted in comparison with the archaeological record.

Research on the content and structure of the donation letter was prominent during the 1920s and again in the 1970s and '80s (e.g. Weibull 1923, 1925; Köcher 1923; Christensen 1969, 1977; Skansjö & Sundström 1989; Weibull 1989). Since then, our archaeological knowledge about settlements and the organization of (rural) society in Late Iron Age and the medieval period has changed markedly, and within the last couple of years a fundamentally new interpretation of settlement organization has been presented (Hansen 2015).

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether King Cnut's donation letter can be seen to correspond with an idea of a strict judicial structure, i.e. a hundred- and *thing*-system as known from medieval law texts (twelfth and thirteenth centuries). And if this is the case, the question then is whether it is possible to arrive at a tentative dating of the assessment of land according to Annette Hoff's hypothesis (see below) underlying the listing of hides in the document, and thereby establish an interdisciplinary basis for pro-

tohistoric assessments of land in Denmark based on archaeological, as well as written, records, and also place names.

Initially, I will outline the archaeological results from my thesis on settlement organization, so as to provide comparison with the surviving written records. Secondly, I will address the content of the donation letter of 1085. My primary focus will be on the presence, and absence, of localities identified in accordance with the hundreds system. Apparent inconsistencies in the use of designating hundreds and lands have, since the 1920s, been a challenge for settlement and legal historians in attempting to systematically correlate the content and structure of the donation letter with requirements of, and legal affiliation towards, a *thing*-system of the hides mentioned. By combining the archaeological and the written record, I will discuss how these inconsistencies can be explained within the complex dynamics of the organization of settlements.

Before addressing the theme in further detail, I will emphasize that I speak from the point of view of an archaeologist, and the paper is to be seen as a contribution to what will hopefully be a fruitful dialogue between archaeologists, historians and philologists in trying to understand this amazing document in its context of eleventh-century settlement history.

## Research history

From the 1920s onwards, scholars such as the historian Lauritz Weibull (1923, 1925), Arthur Köcher

Vill	Designation	Vill	Designation
	Lund		Zealand
Lilla Uppåkra		Øm	Ramsø Hundred
Uppåkra		Tjæreby	Sømme Hundred
Herrestad		Vindinge	Tune hundred
Skälshög		Skuldelev	Horns Hundred
Flädie		Onsved	
Hilleshög		Smørumnedre	
Håstad		Børstingerød	Lynge Hundred
Venestad	Gärd	Tollerup	Jørlunde Hundred
Skättiljunga		Skenkelsø	
Sövestad		Sundbyvester	Amager island
Karlaby		Brøndby	
Brønneslöv		Lomma*	
Sandby	Göinge [Guthisbo]	Helsingborg*	
		Lund*	

Tab. 1: The villas and designating hundreds/areas arranged as listed in King Cnut's donation letter of 1085. The table demonstrates the variation which has been used as arguments related to date the formation of hundreds in different regions of Denmark (i.e. Zealand and Scania). (\*) represents money given annually from plots.

(1923) and Aksel E. Christensen (1977) have been aware of the importance of the donation letter when researching early Danish history (Weibull 1989). Nevertheless, the information about settlement organization provided by the donation letter has hitherto primarily played a part in discussions about the time

of the -thorp-period (which I argue begins c.800 AD, see below), as well as the formation of hundreds in Scania (which I argue might have begun c.600 AD, see below (e.g. Rasmussen 1961, Hald 1974, Jørgensen 1980, Svensson 2015)). The focal point of these discussions has traditionally been the frequency of



Fig. 2: The map depicts the traditional geographic interpretation of the place names listed in King Cnut's donation letter. The name of the individual vill is marked (●) as is the designating name of the local hundred-thing to which jurisdiction the mentioned villas belongs. (■) marks money given annually from plots. The circle marks a 40 km distance from Lund (Based on Fenger 1989:80).

-thorps and the varying use of designating hundreds in relation to the listed villis in different parts of Denmark, i.e. Scania and Zealand (see table 1 and fig. 2). In his dissertation from 1923, Arthur Köcher interpreted the elaboration of hundreds in the donation letter within a context of a formalized *hundred*-system, and thereby the donation letter as a legal document strictly structured according to the formal levels in the legal system contemporary to Cnut's reign (1923: 124, 140). However, some central elements of Köcher's dissertation were rejected in his own time, as well as decades later (Weibull 1925; Bergh 1988: 44). As a result, Köcher's general idea of the donation letter being strictly structured within the *thing*-system has not played a significant part in contextualizing the donation letter within research of settlement history in general.

Nowadays, the donation letter plays a rather absent part in research that addresses the organization of landscapes and settlements of the eleventh century. Symptomatic of this is that the most prominent explanation of the use of the designating place names (e.g. Ramsö härad, Horns härad etc.) seems to rely on the theory of Ole Fenger (fig. 2), presented in the discussion at a seminar in Lund in 1985, and reiterated in his contribution to vol. 4 of *Denmark's history* from 1988 (1988: 126, 1989: 80).

Fenger's theory explains the varying use of names of hundreds from geographic closeness relative to Lund cathedral, with the assumption that only for the identification of the remote farms (>40 km) was there a need for designated place names. The theory is sought strengthened by a represen-

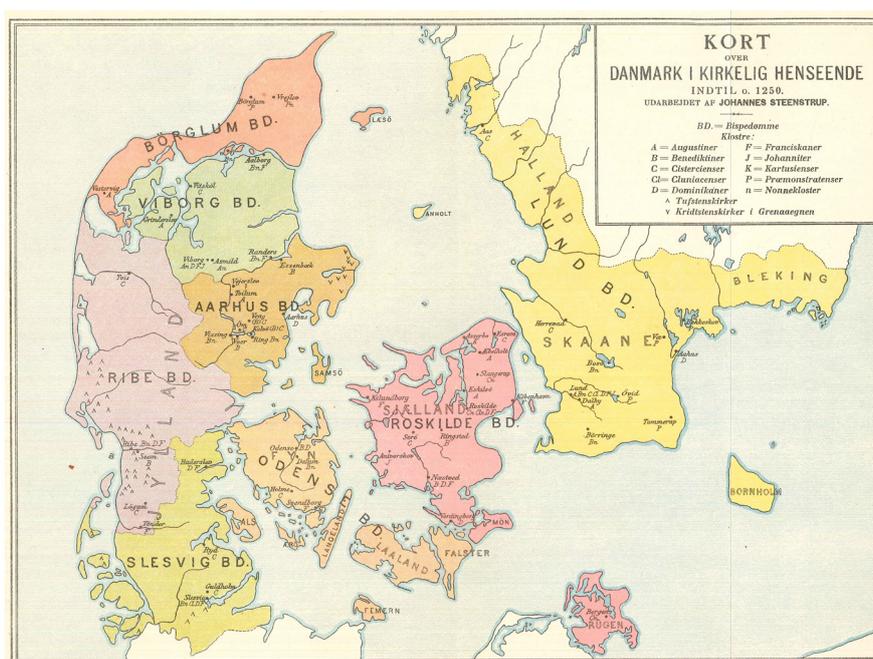
tation on a modern map where a perfect circle is used to illustrate the geographic threshold for this requirement, without any regard to landscape, waterscape, infrastructure or the context of landscape organization, i.e. features which one could rightly argue to be inextricably linked. Therefore, let us take a closer look at the context of landscape organization in which the donation letter was produced.

## Archaeological settlement history in South Western Scandinavia 200-1200 AD

The following section summarises the overall archaeological conclusions of my PhD thesis on landscape organization in the period 200-1200 AD. This study incorporates a large and multifaceted dataset consisting of place names, maps, written documents, and archaeological findings of 1547 excavated houses supplemented by 1466 radiocarbon-datings from the island of Funen in central Denmark (Hansen 2015; 2019).

The result of the thesis challenged the settlement-historical paradigm that had characterized the relevant scholarship since the 1970s, according to which it was assumed that the settlement organization known from the medieval period was established during a period from the tenth to the twelfth century (Grøngaard Jeppesen 1981, Porsmose 1981, Hvass 1983, Skansjö 1983). In the mid-1980s, Johan Callmer adjusted the South Swedish/Scanian settlement model, suggesting that up to half of the historic vil-

Fig. 3: Denmark in the medieval period and its division into dioceses (Steenstrup 1896). Funen and surrounding islands lie in central Denmark with Odense as the main town and episcopal centre.



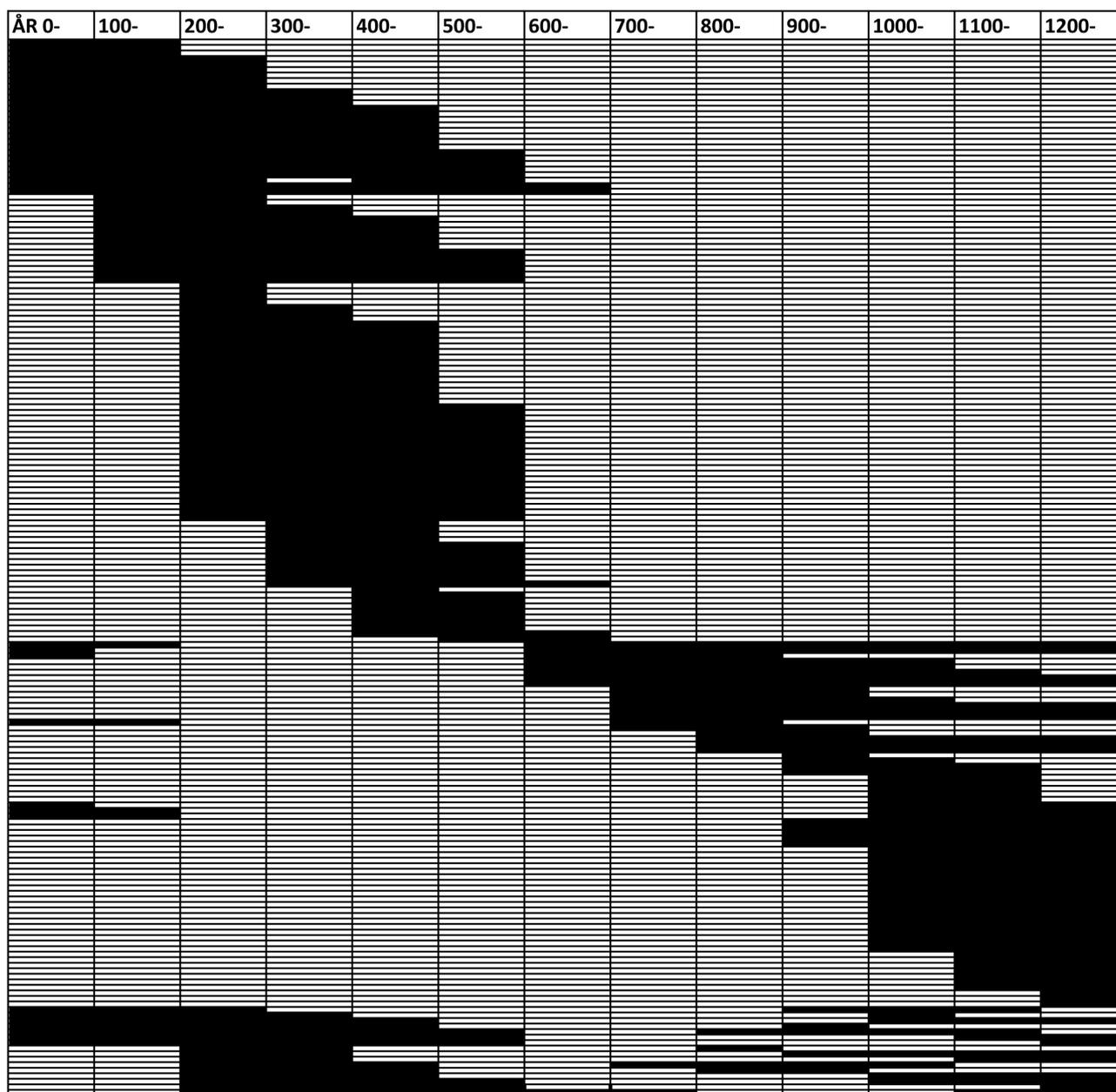


Fig. 4: Diagram displaying the site continuity of all Funen settlements 200-1200 AD (Hansen 2015).

lages in Scania ought to be categorized as geographically static or semistatic (site-fixed), with only minor geographical corrections since the late migration period or early Viking Age (Callmer 1986). A similar adjustment of the widely accepted settlement model based on the case study from the town of Vorbasse in central Jutland never really gained traction in the Danish scholarly community, and so the Vorbasse model was generally unchallenged until the late 2010s (Hansen 2011, 2015). Despite minor differences between the paradigmatic Danish and Swedish theories, a shared feature was the idea that even if settlement continuity was found across the periods, this never led to interpretations of structural continuity between prehistoric and historic times, because a

notable reorganization of the farms during the early medieval period was unquestioningly assumed (e.g. Callmer 1986: 186, 1991: 346, Jönsson and Persson 2008: 145, 183ff).

My study from Funen (figs.3 & 4) shows that until the beginning of the seventh century farms were generally relocated every 30 to 40 years, without displaying any fixed duration or direct ties to neighbouring farms (Hansen 2015; 2019). In contrast to this absence of micro-scale temporal uniformity, the archaeological material displays remarkable macro-scale coherence of circumstance, dividing the excavated settlements into two consecutive groups. This division is characterized by the observation that

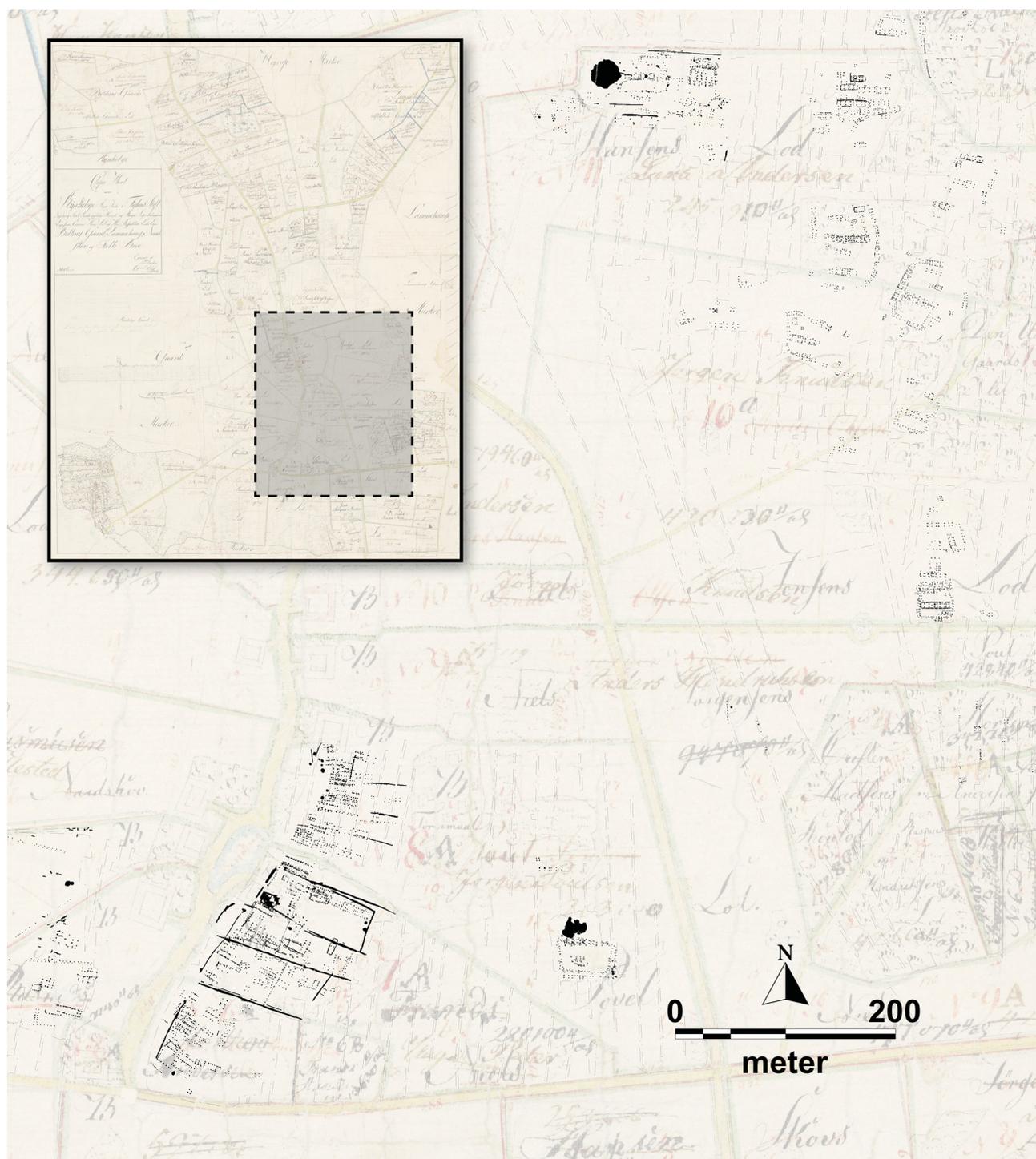


Fig. 5: Excavations in and around the village of Rynkeby, on central Funen, 200-1400 AD. The fixation of the present-day village took place around 600 AD (Hansen 2019).

the settlement grounds dated to the sixth century never continues through the seventh century. In other words, during a relatively short period of time, roughly set to 600 AD, settlements were reorganized and relocated. Displaying all the analysed data in a single diagram specifying site-continuity for the individual settlements clearly demonstrates that something fundamental happened in terms of land organization

around 600 AD.

To illustrate the general process in question, the village of Rynkeby on central Funen represents the most complete structural picture (fig. 5). The cluster of late Roman and migration period farms to the northeast was loosely organized within a typical parcel-like structure. From a time around 600 AD no further farms were built or rebuilt in that area, and

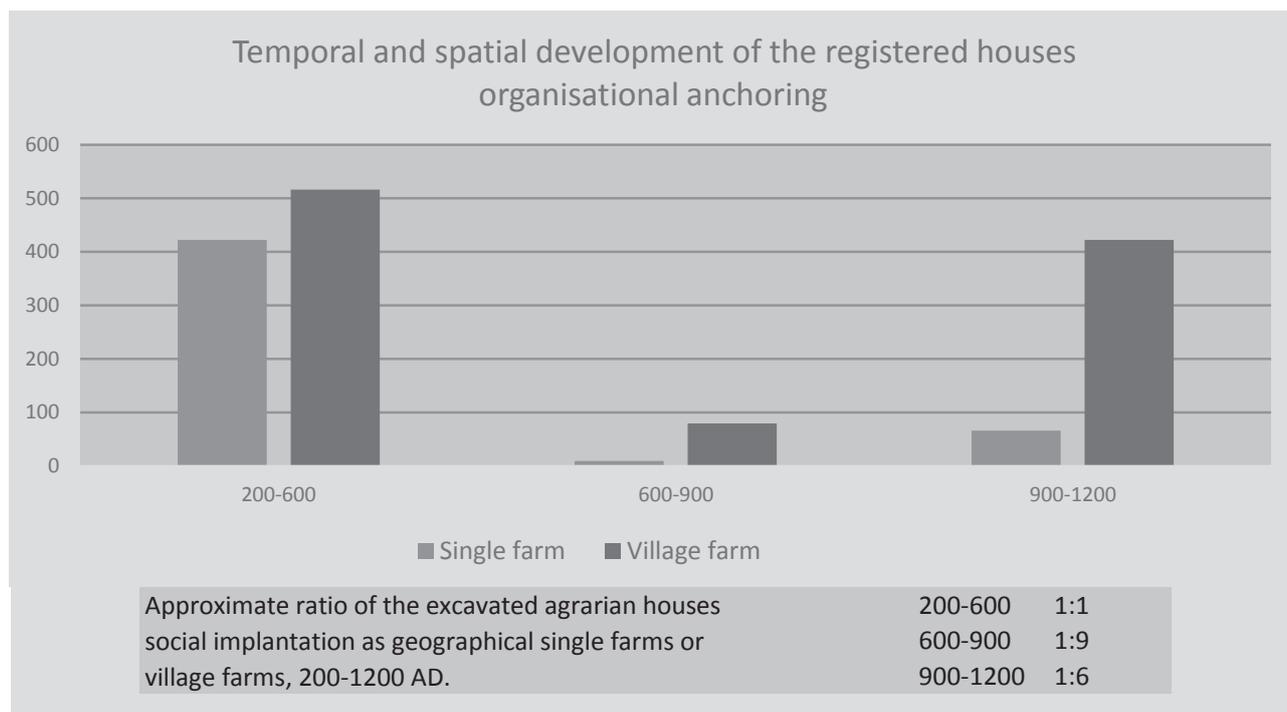


Fig. 6: Model displaying the frequency of excavated single farms and village farms during the first millennium (Hansen 2015).

all later structures are found within the boundary of the historic village dated from 600 AD until the present day (Hansen 2011, 2015, 2019). This is a village fundamentally different from the late Roman and migration period settlement, now structured in much larger and regular side-by-side tofts, which would or could be divided into smaller units, probably owing to a division of a family's inheritance.

Apart from the general reorganization, further distinctions can be seen regarding settlement-organization before and after 600 AD. When displaying all the farms in a diagram, divided into single farms or regular village farms, it is clear that the organizational system fundamentally based on the unstable single farm was replaced by a system based on regular villages around 600 AD. In fact, single farms from the seventh and eighth centuries have yet to be found on Funen, whereas single farms from the previous centuries are very common – as is, to a certain degree, the case from late Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages (fig. 6).

Addressing the formation-process of the historically known villas (e.g. Rynkeby, fig. 5, small map) is another classical question to which I have paid renewed attention. Such analyses have to implement some kind of an evaluation of spatial synchronization between the actual settlements and the borders of the individual vill in terms of an economically rational

positioning. My working hypothesis is as follows: If the analysis reveals a period when the settlements in general display a particularly prominent central position within the villas, this period is assumed to be the time of establishment of the oldest existing layer of villas (fig. 7).

Analysis on a macro-scale level demonstrates that

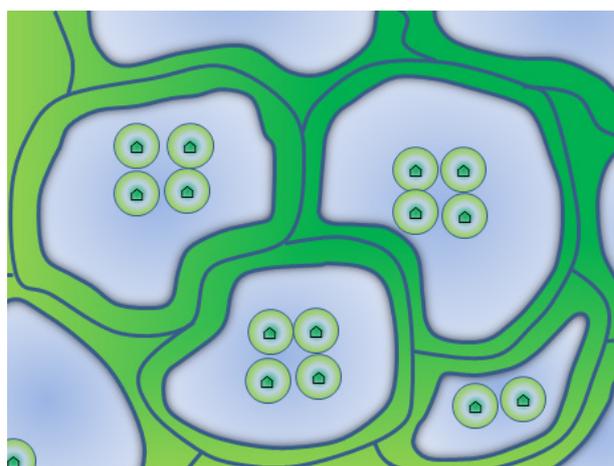


Fig. 7: Theoretical model of the vill and settlement at the time of the formation of villas in Denmark (Hansen 2015).

there is no strict correlation between recorded settlements dated between 200-600 AD and the fundamental organization of land- and village structures known from medieval laws, legal documents and

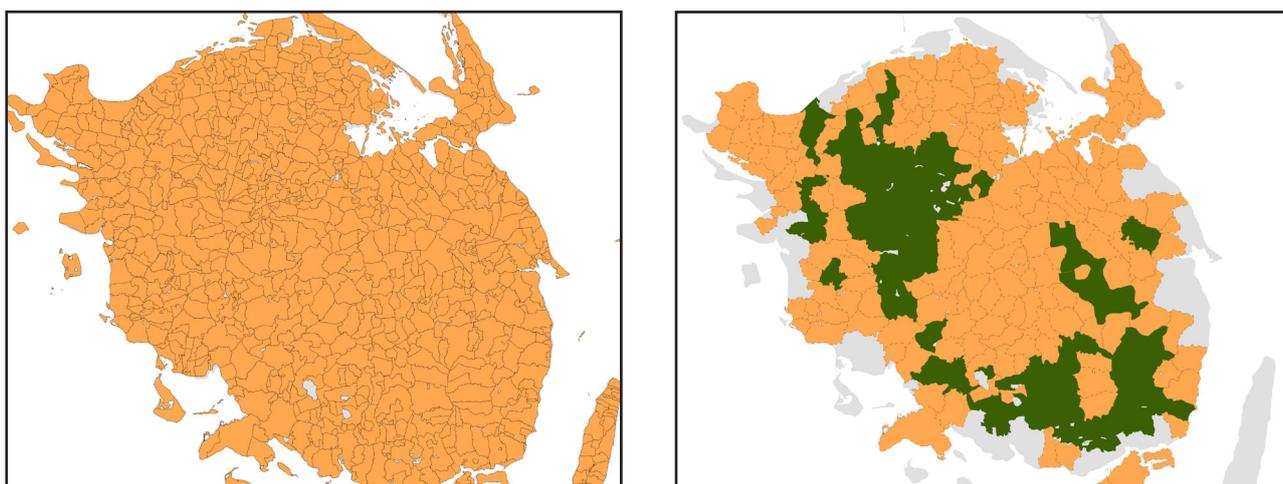


Fig. 8: Medieval vills (left) and 600-800 AD primary-vills before the outparcelling of thorps and magnate farms (right). Green represents forest while grey coastal areas are unresolved (Hansen 2015).

eighteenth-century cadastral maps (cf. fig. 5). When we look at the settlements from the seventh to the ninth century, on the other hand, the data show a very different and remarkable feature when compared with the aforementioned older settlements. When combined with the cartographic material displaying the vills of present villages, there is a striking tendency towards a simple correlation. The seventh- to ninth-century agrarian settlements are, systematically, centrally placed with surrounding land well suited for agrarian production.

Reassembling original vills (primary-vill), here meaning vills prior to outparcelling of magnate farms and thorps, is a well-known method (e.g. Christensen & Sørensen 1972; Porsmose 1987: 45, 66; Hansen 2015: 148-156; Hansen & Lauridsen 2019; Hansen in prep). By combining the method with (pre-Viking Age) place names it is possible to approximate a map sketch representing the organizational divisions and the macro settlement structure of the Late Iron Age (fig. 8, right).

On the basis of the new, substantial empirical material and multifaceted analyses it seems likely that the fixed landscape organization, which still outlines the principle structures of modern rural Denmark, was established around 600 AD. I have further argued, that it was initially a bottom-up response to a centrally initiated top-down reorganization and division of landscapes, as fiscal rights to land would have been introduced as a backbone of central power, in contrast to individual alliances and everchanging relations in the previous period (Hansen 2015; Hansen in prep). As such, Danish land-organization after c.600 AD could be seen in parallel to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, where the *hide*, relative in size, constituted an internal measure of duties and obligations

within each vill (Campbell 1990: 59; Ryan 2011), and the *vills* constituted the smallest fiscal and administrative unit which included formal obligations pertaining to the upkeep of bridges, roads and forts, the levying of men in times of war, and also simple food-rents of grain and livestock (Ault 1982: 188; Hansen 2015: 157-172).

Local village assemblies appear to be quite clearly defined structural entities in the late Iron Age and the medieval period. These, however, did not seem to form direct part of a central administration (Meyer 1949: 28). Rather, as a stable division of land organization, vills would have been very suitable for assessing a fixed geographical framework closely related to certain obligations. From an administrative point of view, this is an oversimplification compared to the labile settlement structure of the late Roman and early Germanic period.

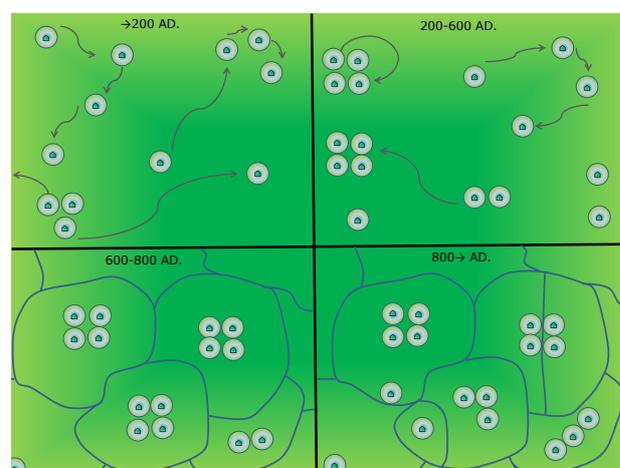


Fig. 9: Model describing the general development of settlement organization from 200 AD onwards (Hansen 2015).

The development of the settlement-organization leading up to the time of King Cnut IV can be summed up in a simplified model and described in four steps (fig. 9).

Until the third century, settlement organization was characterized by unfixed and small 'jurisdictional' units primarily organized as single farms or, alternatively, small villages typically consisting of 3-4 farm units. This organization does not reveal any fixed long-lasting geographic borders corresponding to modern cadastral maps/vills. Settlement organization reflects a loose structure, where the geographic jurisdiction seems to have been closely connected to the individual settlement. This leaves plenty of geographic and organizational space for moving around, resulting in an ever-changing economic structure which would have been difficult to control centrally. From the third to the sixth century, village organizations can be generally perceived to have been similar to that of preceding centuries. However, significantly larger settlements emerge in this period, and these centuries are characterized by general growth and diversity in terms of settlement size.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, settlement organization is marked by significant change. Initially, this is reflected by farms moving together, centrally placed within fixed geographic structures defined by the vills, a structure which is still visible to some extent on historical cadastral maps. In the course of these two centuries, ordinary single farms appear to be almost absent, and the jurisdictional units of the settlements appear to be centred on the villages, thus making the village the primary organizational entity. In large parts of Funen, the landscape was fully divided into vills. This organizational system counteracts the previously dominant unfixed and farm-based settlement structure, and at the same time supports the possibility of exercising long-term administration of land and resources due to its stability.

From the ninth century onwards, including King Cnut's reign (1080-1086), the archaeological record once again displays single farms, and the settlement organization is characterized by expansion, leading to a wide range of adjustments. In this process, *thorps* and *magnate farms* were outparcelled from existing villages, while yet other villages could be divided. This process was, however, restrained by the basic geographic structure established around 600 AD.

Keeping in mind the development of historical settlements outlined above, let us turn to King Cnut's 1085 donation letter and contextualize this within a framework comprised of simple duties bound to

vills as the smallest fiscal units in Viking Age and early medieval Denmark. This will hopefully shed light on the research potential regarding the administrative system which has hitherto not been utilized.

## Contextualizing King Cnut's donation letter

The following contextualization of the donation letter within the outlined model of settlement history is, as mentioned, based on a variety of data. Aside from the donation letter and the archaeological model describing the basics of the development of settlement organization, this contextualization implements the regional Danish landscape laws (the Scanian law, the Zealandic law, the Jutlandic law) from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a hypothetical early *mansus* assessment, and the better known twelfth-century gold assessment as described by the historian Annette Hoff. In addition, it also implements the geographic spread and dating of the place name element *-thorp* and *-thorps* mentioned in the Falster List (c.1250 related to King Valdemar II's Land Register). In this discussion, it is the connection to a *thing*-system contemporary to the donation letter which is in focus, while the donation letter's connection to the king and the church is of less importance.

### *A working hypothesis*

My working hypothesis for the analytical contextualization of King Cnut's donation letter is to consider it as related to and arranged in accordance with contemporary legal structures and procedures.

According to the somewhat later Jutlandic Law of 1241, the *thing*-system functions as follows (1§37, my translation): "On the *thing* you shall register rights to land and not elsewhere, that is to say on the hundred-*thing* in which the land is situated, or on the county-*thing* or on the land-*thing*, or before the king, for the *thing*-witness is so binding, that there cannot be given evidence against it." And the Scanian Law states that registration of land conducted locally, had less legal effect than registration of land carried out at the *things* (Skautrup 1933; Meyer 1957).

As the 1085 donation letter was written and functioned within an old geographic landscape organization that reached back to c.600 AD, and as the letter addresses lands under multiple jurisdictions, it seems reasonable to suggest that the donation letter, when it was drafted, was in fact documenting completed (South-western Scania) as well as planned

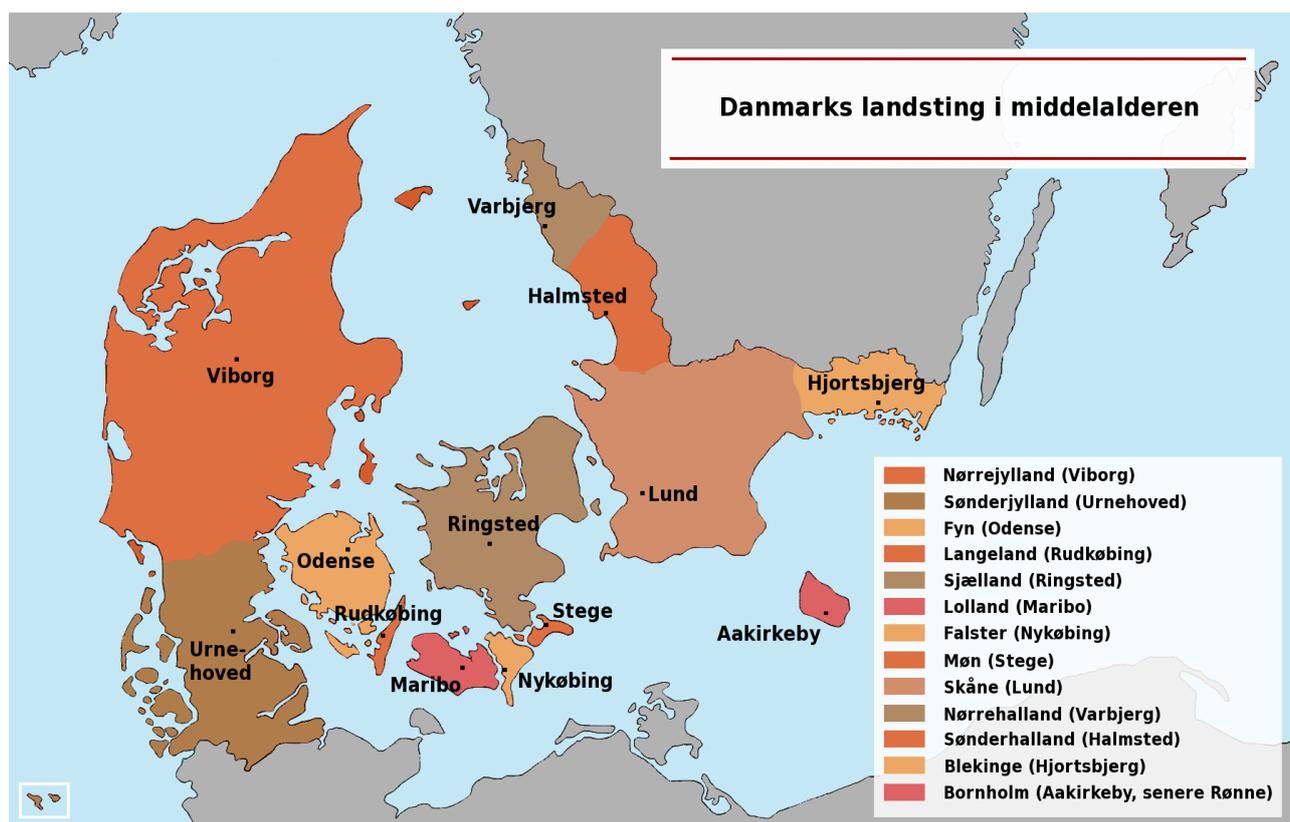


Fig. 10: The thirteen medieval land-things in Denmark and their jurisdiction. In Eastern Denmark Lund and Ringsted (representing Scania and Zealand) are considered the most important. All thirteen lands have constituted their own jurisdictions, where the customary principles have allowed some variation (e.g. differences in medieval landscape laws), while conversely, a few legal principles (laws) directly related to the king are supposed to have been under the joint influence of the king (directly or indirectly), across the entire kingdom. The land(-things) are seen by many as having emerged in prehistoric times (Rosén 1965; Jørgensen 1969: 18, 238; map © Wikimedia Commons).

(Zealand, Amager and North-eastern Scania) transfers of land, systematically oriented in accordance with a contemporary *thing*-system ‘...in which the land is situated...’, consistent with the 1241 Jutlandic Law. As a consequence, the listed land-thing and hundred-thing, e.g. Zealand in Ramsø Hundred, is to be explained from a systematic *thing*-orientation rather than in terms of linear geographical closeness as previously suggested (e.g. Fenger 1989: 77ff). In other words, the document refers explicitly to the *things* outside the jurisdiction of the *land-thing* in Lund, Scania. This is done to effectuate King Cnut’s donation by pinpointing the *things* needed for conducting the *thing*-witness legally required to consolidate the right to a specific tract of land. In Lund itself, all changes related to Scanian land could/would be rightfully and legally conducted at the *land-thing*, but further action elsewhere was necessary at the specific *things* mentioned (fig. 10).

## Some irregularities and analytical challenges

In order to meet the theory of a strict *thing* orientation of the donation letter, we have to address some irregularities regarding this interpretation. I am here particularly referring to the omitted designating *thing*- and hundred-names in the case of Smørhem minore (Smørumnedre), Insula Amacum Sundby (Sundbyvester), and Brundby (Brøndby), as well as the existence of two designating names in Scania, namely ‘A Geri. In Winistadum’ (Venestad in Gärd) and ‘A Guthisbo. In Sandby’ (Sandby in Göinge), both of which are known to have formed actual hundreds in historic times (see table 1). Before addressing these seeming irregularities, it is important to emphasize some of the challenges of analysing the content of King Cnut’s donation letter.

The original document was known only until 1696, but is now lost. Our knowledge of Cnut’s donation letter and its content is therefore based on three transcripts, all of which are believed to have been

produced on the basis of the original document. The oldest transcript is that of *Necrologium Lundense* from 1123 (fig. 1) (Weibull 1925: 105ff). The two remaining transcripts are considerably younger, dated to 1494 and 1662 respectively (Weibull 1925: 105). It is important to bear in mind that modern knowledge of King Cnut's donation letter does not rely on the original document, but rather on the collective information of three transcripts. This affects how we engage with the donation letter as a source, since in the period in which these transcripts were produced, a span of c.540 years, the text of the original donation letter might easily have been subject to various interpretations, additions, or changes. Traditionally, the 1494 and 1662 transcripts are considered by scholars to be closest to the original (Weibull 1925: 106, DRB 1.2:21). However, it is important to state that all three versions differ from one another on several points. These differences can be ascribed to scribal errors, misprints, or deliberate manipulation or change of the original text, possibly for the text to better represent changes in the administrative reality since the time of Cnut, such as new assessments of land, outparcelling of thorps, or implementation of parishes as administrative units from c.1135-1215 (Jørgensen 1980: 33ff; Kieffer-Olsen 2018: 42). Of course, when using the transcripts in research, the lack of the original document entails a fundamental uncertainty of interpretation concerning the content of the letter, some of which has a bearing on the present paper, and this uncertainty will be dealt with in the following.

To interpret the content of the donation letter within a framework of settlement history contemporary to the donation of 1085 is difficult, and to prove a direct and consequent relationship to a defined *thing*-system even more so. Nevertheless, in the exploration of such a relationship, the specific connections between the geographic hides and the listed/named hides becomes a core issue, as that precise link is what represents the fundamental character of the donation letter vis-à-vis a systematic geographic *thing*-structure. However, the attempt to establish unequivocal connections between the listed hides[*mansi*]/place names and well-known geographical locations is, in several cases, challenging. The challenge lies in the list not being particularly specific, and preserved documents that can provide comparative evidence are few. Medieval documents, such as those of Lund listed below, simply mention quantities of property within specific villas. Attempts to substantiate the designation of the mentioned villas from the donation

letter can, however, be carried out through systematic studies of later land registers and other documents, thus trying to follow the designation of property. In that respect, Lund cathedral offers good data from the land registers from 1570 and 1650 (Paulsson & Skansjö 2017).

Paulsson and Skansjö have demonstrated possible connections between hides mentioned in the donation letter and the Uppåkra hides listed in the land registers (*bona preposituræ*) from 1570 and 1650 (Paulsson & Skansjö 2017: 24). Systematic historical studies of all hides mentioned in the donation letter would be preferable for a study of settlement history, as some of the place names mentioned are not unique to Scania or Zealand (e.g. Hildeshøj, Håsted, Vindinge, Brøndby etc.). To my knowledge, no such systematic study has been undertaken, and therefore the map presented by Fenger represents only one possible suggestion out of many. (fig. 2) Yet another challenge consists of pinpointing the exact connection between *mansi* listed in the donation letter of 1085 and *mansi* listed in the land registers of 1570 and 1650 or documents in general not contemporary with King Cnut's letter. This is because by the end of the medieval period, almost one in ten of all Scanian tithe-paying farms was owned by the church in Lund (Paulsson & Skansjö 2017: 26). Nevertheless, possible convergences between the donation letter of 1085 and the later registers of land will, in my opinion, strengthen an argument for a similar convergence between the mentioned farms. This notion is of particular relevance to the mention of *Brundby*, as will be outlined later.

#### *A Geri and A Guthisbo*

When dealing with the irregularities in the text related to 'A Geri' and 'A Guthisbo', and trying to explain why designating place names are used only in these two Scanian instances, at least two perspectives can be addressed. First, within a system based on geographically organized *thing*-witness, it seems relevant to look for administrative changes of the Scanian lands around the time of the donation letter. Secondly, it also seems relevant to look for inconsistencies after 1085 that would appear when comparing the 1123 document to the younger versions.

Regarding the idea of administrative changes, these must be seen in light of political events earlier in the eleventh century. Unrest in the 1020s meant that in 1026 Cnut the Great – Cnut IV's granduncle – had to go to Denmark to secure his continued political rule in the North Sea world (DRB 1.1:422; Saxo

10.16). According to Saxo, the Swedes continuously intruded Scania and Cnut's journey resulted in large battles at Stangbjærg and at Helgåen near Åhus, and despite the results of the battles his position as king appears to have been strengthened, both politically as well as territorially (*ibid.*). In 1027, Cnut the Great announced that in addition to being king of England and Denmark, he was also king of the Norwegians and part of the land of the Swedes (DRB 1.1:422). It is unclear which part of Sweden was being referred to. If we take as a starting point the location of the battle at Helgå, we might consider the north-eastern part of Scania (later known as Villand, Gärd, Gudesbo[Göinge] and perhaps Albo hundred) and the Blekinge area, which the traveller and trader, Wulfstan, at the end of the eighth century attributed to the Swedes (Christensen 1969: 28), as being that part of Sweden to which Cnut the Great referred in 1027.

At the beginning of Svend Estridsen's reign twenty years later (1047-1074), Denmark was divided into only a few dioceses, but in 1060 Svend divided the diocese of Roskilde into three, Roskilde, Lund and Dalby (Weibull 1923: 112ff). The exact boundary between the dioceses of Lund and Dalby is unclear, but some suggestions have been summarized by Weibull (1923: 115, n. 3). The bishop of Dalby "should take care of the eastern part [of Scania] / as well as that under Blekinge" as Arild Huitfeldt notes in his ecclesiastical history, *Den geistlige histori*, from 1604 (1604, my translation). A similar division also appeared as a cultural and geographical border in the Late Iron Age and the Viking Age, which separated north-eastern Scania (coinciding with Villand, Gärd, Gudesbo and Albo hundred) and Blekinge from southwestern Scania (Fabech 1993; Fabech et al. 2017: 78). However, in ecclesiastical matters, the division of Scania, Halland and Blekinge into the dioceses of Lund and Dalby became a short-lived affair, and after Bishop Henrik died c.1066, the lands were gathered under the diocese of Lund with the former Dalby bishop, Egino, as its bishop (fig. 3). Egino died in 1072, and his successor, Rikvald (bishop 1072-1089), appears as a witness in Cnut IV's donation letter from 1085, according to which Cnut proclaimed the cathedral church of Lund "forever to be a bride of the lamb that carries the sin of the world" (Huitfeldt 1604). At that time, the diocese of Lund stood out as particularly powerful among the dioceses of Denmark, and it included territory from all three Scania lands (Scania, Halland and Blekinge), in addition to the island of Bornholm.

The donation letter was thus written in a geo-

graphical and political context where the administrative superstructures had undergone significant changes over the course of half a century. Within a *thing*-system, based on *thing*-witness as the legal prerequisite for making claims of land, such administrative changes do very well explain the need for designation of the North-eastern Scanian hides in the villas in 'A Geri' and 'A Guthisbo', as done in 1085. Gärd and Gudesbo were located outside the historical Scanian heartland, and in an area which historically, geographically and administratively had not been fully integrated into the traditional Danish part of the Scanian heartland (before 1027). Consequently, this area had not been subordinated to the formal jurisdiction of the land-*thing* in Lund in matters concerning claims to land. The same explanation clarifies the parallel use of designating geography in a similar letter dated January the 6<sup>th</sup> 1135, documenting King Erik II Emune's donation of hides in specific villas under the jurisdiction of Gärd, Villand and the island of Amager, given to the Church of St Laurentius, Lund (Appendix 2 and DRB 1.2:63; Dipl.Dan 1.2:63).

Yet another feature is worth a brief remark when looking at all three transcriptions of the donation letter together. Attention must be drawn to the fact that 'A Geri. In Winistadum' does not figure in the 1123 transcription of *Necrologium Lundense* (fig. 1, p. 1, ln. 18). This could of course be explained as a flaw in the 1123 transcription, but an alternative interpretation would be that 'A Geri. In Winistadum. unus mansus' was not actually part of the 1085 donation letter and had been added to the text sometime after 1123. Such an explanation would likewise mean that the Scanian part of the list is a coherent list, which is followed in the end by a single designation of the remote 'A Guthisbo. In Sandby. unus mansus'.

Following "A Guthisbo. In Sandby" in Scania, the document turns to Zealand. As already mentioned, the document is very coherent and lists the gifts under the jurisdiction of the land-*thing* of Zealand, systematically subdivided into hundreds and specific villas, e.g. "In Hornsherathi Sculdalef. unus mansus" (see appendix 1).

#### *Smørhem minore*

In the donation letter, "Smørhem minore" is listed third after Hornsherati, following the villas 'Sculdalef' and 'in Othense'. Smørhem minore is interpreted as the still existing Smørumnedre (DS: Smørumnedre) in Smørum herred, as no village called *Smørum minore* is known to have existed in Hornsherati/

Hornsherred. As such, a missing designating hundred related to Smørhem minore stands out as an irregularity. Whether the coinciding name for a vill (Smørum) and a hundred (Smørum) could cause the irregularity in the listing, as the designating name of the hundred was implicit, is a possibility worth considering.

Another matter worth consideration pertains to a defunct hundred just south of Smørhem. The hundred existed until the late seventeenth century and was named 'lidlæ', small, or in Latin 'minore'. A royal letter of privilege from 1145 represents the earliest evidence of that hundred which, in conjunction with Smørum hundred, constitutes an area where the hundred-structure has been subject to quite some changes (Dipl.Dan. 1.2:91; Trap 1960: 985).

When speaking of Smørhem minore, I find the first explanation for why the donation letter does not provide a designating hundred for Smørhem to be the most plausible one. However, either of the circumstances mentioned above could explain why the designating hundred name appears to be missing for Smørhem minore in all the three transcripts of the donation letter. As we will see in the case of Brundby, other circumstances might provide some further explanation.

#### *Insula Amacum Sundby*

Insula Amacum Sundby follows the listing of the hides of Zealand, and as such 'Insula Amacum' seems to function as a designation in the same way as the hundreds, although we do not know of any Insula Amacum hundred (or land) and it is not likely to have ever existed.

However, in cases where it was desirable for administrative or practical reasons (e.g. remoteness), additional jurisdictions, called *birk*, were established with their own *thing*, *Birke-thing* (Lerdam 2004: 27). The institution of the *birk* is considered to be as old as the hundred-institution, and we know from King Valdemar II's Land Register (1231) that Insula Amacum [Amakæ] constituted such a *birk* as part of Sokkelund hundred [Støfnæsheret] (Lerdam 2004: 27, 93, 132; Vjb. 1.2 20, 2.1 157).

This would explain the missing designating hundred name, as Insula Amacum had its own *thing* in jurisdictional matters. As a consequence, the designation of Insula Amacum is in line with the proposed idea of systematic references to the *thing*-system in King Cnut's donation letter.

#### *Brundby*

Following the listing of Insula Amacum, the dona-

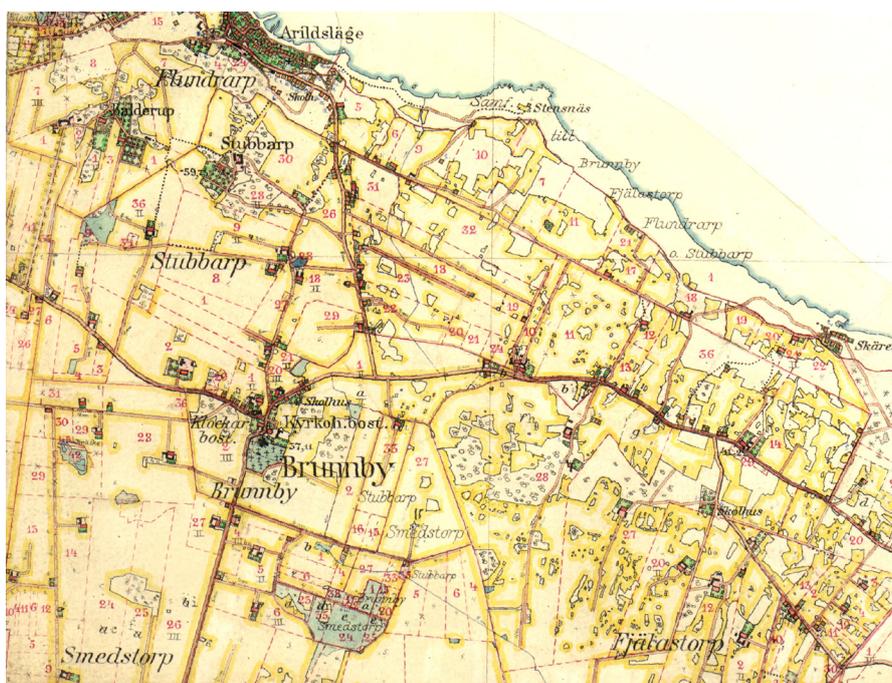
tion letter mentions 'In Brundby tres mansi'. Traditionally, Brundby is interpreted as the Zealandic Brøndby in Smørum hundred (e.g. Madsen 1863: 197; Fenger 1989; DS: Brøndby). However, the text does not contain any designating hundred name that would unequivocally support this specific interpretation. We must however note that the place name Brundby is not unique and that other villages named Brundby exist (DS: Brundby). Of special interest in this context is the onomastically identical Brunnby in Luggude herred, Scania.

The fact that 'Brundby' is listed in continuation of the series of villas on Zealand and the nearby island of Amager, has led to the traditional, and seemingly unquestioned, interpretation of this being the Brundby of Zealand. Yet at the same time we must bear in mind that the place names which are listed after Brundby in the donation letter are all Scanian, namely Helsingborg, Lomma and Lund. Furthermore, listings in comparable documents are known to shift back and forth between different regions/lands. This is exemplified in a donation letter from 1135, where the listing of the donations given by Peder, Hemming, Jørgen and their mother shifts back and forth between Zealand, Møn and Falster (DRB 1.2:64; Dipl.Dan 1.2:64). This principle stands in contrast to the syntax related to villas within specific hundreds, as these always seem to be listed consecutively (e.g. appendix 2).

Aside from the missing designating name of the corresponding hundred, what seems to further contradict the interpretation of the listed Brundby as representing a vill at Zealand, is the case of 'Smøhem minore', if this is to be interpreted as Smørumnedre. Smørumnedre and the Zealandic Brøndby are both part of Smørum hundred. If we follow the pattern of listing which is general to the donation letter as well as to other comparable documents from the same time (e.g. DRB 1.2:63-64), we would expect all gifts from one particular hundred to be listed one after the other (e.g. 'In Hornsherathi Sculdalef. unus mansus. In Othense unus mansus'), but Smørumnedre and Brøndby are not listed together. This can be seen as an indication of the two villas not belonging to the same hundred-*thing*, i.e. that the 'Brundby' mentioned in the donation letter is not the one on Zealand.

Summarizing the indications which pertain to Brundby's missing organizational relationship with Smørhem minore, the fact that Brundby has no designating hundred name, and that all following men-

Fig. 11: Hundred-economic/  
Häradsekonomisk map (1910-15)  
depicting the Scanian Brunnby  
[Brundby?] and nearby thorps, i.e.  
Smedstorp, Fjälastorp, Flundrarp  
and Stubbarp, © Lantmäteriet.



tions in the list are Scanian, makes it tempting to look more closely at matters concerning Brunnby in Luggude hundred in Scania. Could this actually be the Brundby mentioned in the donation letter? If so, the document then displays a list of place names organised strictly according to the *thing* structure.

As already stated, because there are very few descriptive details in the written documents, it is almost impossible to demonstrate indisputable connections between the donation letter and the later lists of the possessions of Lund cathedral. When we add to that the possible further alterations in the organizational structure (e.g. establishing of parishes and adjustments of the hundreds), re-assessing the lands during medieval period, and a potential use of new administrative place names due to outparcelling of thorps and manors from 800 AD onwards, it becomes even harder to connect specific property with information found in different written documents.

Based on the model of settlement history (fig. 8) and administrative alterations and updates during the centuries, we ought to expect that at least some hides, *mansi*, will be called by various names in the documents, in accordance with changes of administrative place names, even though the hide itself would remain the same throughout the period in question. This means that a specific hide related to a contemporary primary-vill in the early Viking Age, could at a later time be related to another administrative place name due to an outparcelling of a thorp into a new independent vill. After the introduction of the parish structure, that same hide could even be designated

within the name of the parish, thus once again representing a possibility of change in the designating administrative place name. Of course, this adds quite a few challenges in attempting to follow specific hides through time and in written documents, but we need to take this into account when examining the structure of the 1085 donation letter.

When dealing with the reference ‘in Brundby’, it seems obvious to search in medieval documents for connections between the Lund cathedral and hides which, at a point before the establishing of parishes and outparcelling of thorps and manors, would have been part of a larger primary-vill (Brundby, Luggude hundred) in Scania. As such, attention should be paid to the neighbouring thorps, i.e. Stubbarp, Smedstorp, Flundrarp, Fjälastorp/Lindeknävel and Bräcke, as any one of these could in principle have been part of Brundby in 1085 and simply outparcellled hereafter (fig. 9 & fig. 11).

Examining different land registers of Lund cathedral (i.e. *Necrologium Lundense*, *Liber daticus Lundensis vetustior*, *Liber daticus Lundensis recentior* and the Land Registers of 1570 and 1650), we see that connections to Fjälastorp/Lindeknävel, Bräcke, Smidstorp [Smedstorp] and Södåkra did exist in medieval time (Weeke 1889: 256, 263; Paulsson & Skansjö 2017: 175, 180, 377). However, most of these relations are regarded of limited interest, as they seem to represent donations later than 1085.

Of even greater interest is, of course, any direct relation to medieval Brunnby itself. I have not found

any mention of hides in the land registers, but a 1344 letter from Pope Clement VI pinpoints a relation, as the church in Brunnby (built in the mid-twelfth century and so after the donation letter) at that time was related to Lund Cathedral (DRB 3.2:19, Dipl. Dan. 3.2:18, Dahlerup 1976). As such, it is worth a thought whether the church in Brunnby does in fact somehow represent a connection to the three hides mentioned in King Cnut's donation letter of 1085.

All indications taken together, I find it most likely that the Brundby mentioned in the donation letter is in fact the Scanian Brunnby in Luggude hundred and not Brøndby in Smørum hundred on Zealand as hitherto interpreted.

## To address irregularities systematically

As stated above, there are good reason to challenge some of the traditional interpretations of the donation letter from 1085. Accepting the above sugges-

tions frames the donation letter as strictly and systematically organised according to the thing-system as known from the medieval period. Moreover, it can also be seen to consistently correspond to the judicial principles known from the twelfth- and thirteenth-century landscape laws, as already mentioned: "On the thing you shall register rights to land and not elsewhere, that is to say on the hundred-thing in which the land is situated, or on the county-thing or on the land-thing, or before the king, for the thing-witness is so binding, that there cannot be given evidence against it." (see table 2 and fig. 12). As such, awareness of the geographical origin of the setting down of donation letters (in terms of the related land-thing jurisdiction within which it was produced) is of great importance, as further designations at lower hierarchical levels (i.e. hundred or birk) were in such cases superfluous.

In the case of King Cnut's donation letter from Lund, the above-mentioned principle of designation would lead to a structure of the letter, where all hides as part of villas under the jurisdiction of the land-thing

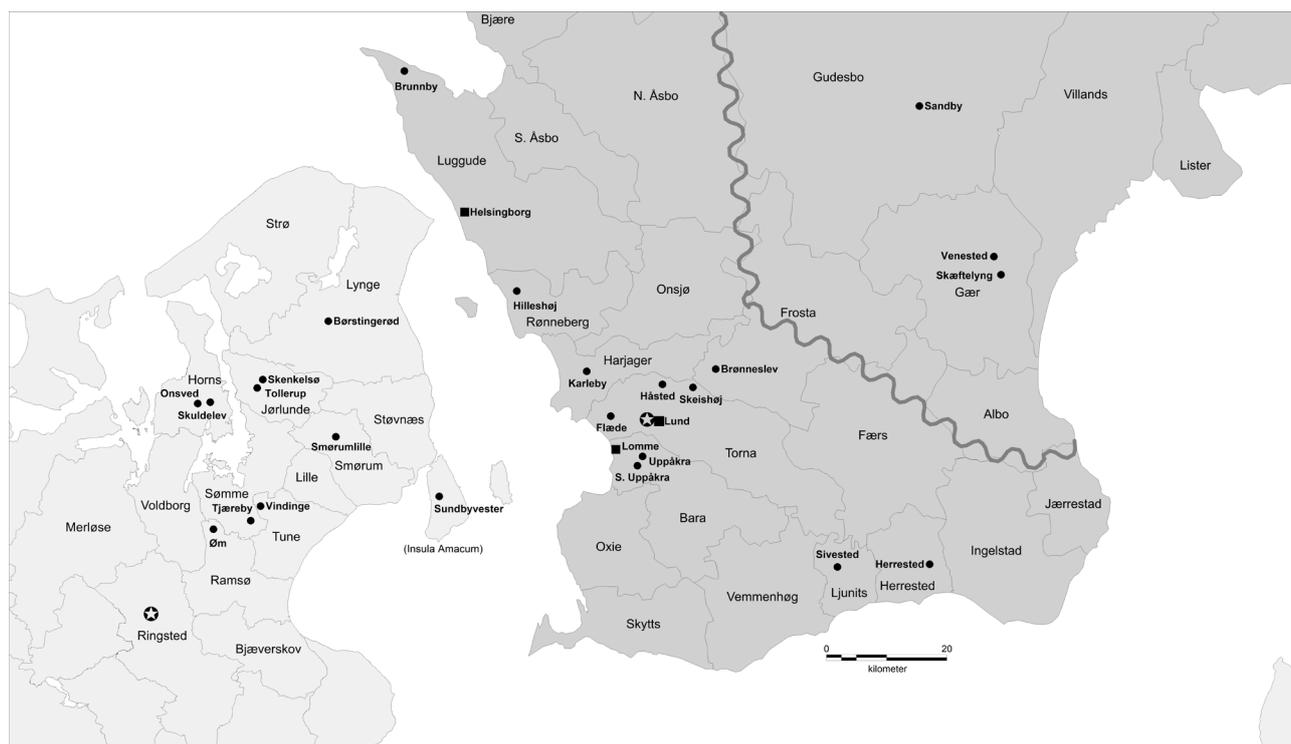


Fig. 12: Map illustrating the villas (●) listed in King Cnut's donation letter and the geographic-judicial principle underlying the use of designating things (land, hundred, birk), resulting specifically from the geographical origin of the set down of the letter. As King Cnut's letter originates from Lund and thus Scania, the jurisdiction of the land-thing in Lund is implicit and legal requirements are/can be fulfilled. Consequently, all hides belonging to villas from the Scanian heartland (southwest) are systematically stated without a designating hundred[-thing]. Conversely, all hides in the remote villas from the north-eastern part of Scania, outside the old Scanian heartland, are consistently listed with designations representing hundred-things or birke-things, as is also the case for all hides related to the Zealandic villas. Note the reinterpretation regarding Brunnby, as the map depicts the Scanian vill Brunnby in Luggude Hundred, and not the Zealandic Brøndby in Smørum Hundred, as is traditionally done.

Vill	Designation	Jurisdiction	Geography	Vill	Designation	Jurisdiction	Geography
	Lund				Zealand		
Lilla Uppåkra		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Øm	Ramsø Hundred	Ramsø Hundred	Zealand, primary
Uppåkra		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Tjæreby	Sømme Hundred	Sømme Hundred	Zealand, primary
Herrestad		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Vindinge	Tune hundred	Tune Hundred	Zealand, primary
Skälshög		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Skuldelev	Horns Hundred	Horns Hundred	Zealand, primary
Flädie		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Onsved	Horns Hundred	Horns Hundred	Zealand, primary
Hilleshög		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Smørumnedre	→→→→→→→→	Smørum Hundred	Zealand, primary
Håstad		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Børstingerød	Lynge Hundred	Lynge Hundred	Zealand, primary
Venestad	Gård	Gård	Scania, secondary	Tollerup	Jørlunde Hundred	Jørlunde Hundred	Zealand, primary
Skättiljunga		Gård	Scania, secondary	Skenkelsø		Jørlunde Hundred	Zealand, primary
Sövestad		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Sundbyvester	Amager island	Amager island (birk)	Zealand, secondary
Karlaby		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Brunnby		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary
Brønneslöv		Lund, implicit	Scania, primary	Lomma*			
Sandby	Göinge [Guthisbo]	Göinge [Guthisbo]	Scania, secondary	Helsingborg*			
				Lund*			

Tab. 2: The villas and designating hundreds/areas are arranged as listed in King Cnut's donation letter of 1085. In addition, my interpretation of the relevant jurisdictions, as well as the geographic location, is listed. Scania is divided into two areas (primary and secondary) in accordance with the text above. The document is said to have been publicly affirmed in Lund, and all hides/villas within the jurisdiction of the land-thing in Lund, is listed as such implicitly. (\*) represents money given annually from plots.

in Lund/Scania are implicit and therefore not to be listed, unlike all the others which should be carefully noted. This is exactly what characterizes the document.

In order to indicate that the demonstrated structure and principle of designation represents a regular judicial practice, I have examined some further donation letters from 1135 onwards (see appendix 2). These represent donations from the king as well as commoners, and they clearly follow the very same principle of designation of villas related to the thing-structure (See also Fenger 1989: 126). From around 1145, the structure of donation letters becomes a little more complex and varied, as explicitly assessed taxation begins to supplement the listing of transfers of hides (e.g. DRB 1.2:88; Dipl.Dan. 1.2:88; DRB 1.2:160; Dipl.Dan. 1.2:160). Nevertheless, the examples clearly demonstrate that everyone was subject to what was considered law – whether king, clergy or commoner (see also Jørgensen 1969: 18).

#### *The hundreds in a 1085 perspective*

If we follow the above analysis, we dismantle the use of regionally based differences in King Cnut's donation letter (i.e. the designation of hundreds) as an argument for claiming the Danish hundreds in Scania to be younger than those on Zealand (except for the hundreds of Northeastern Scania, i.e. Gård, Guthisbo, Villand and Albo). Rather than to use the inconsistent references to hundreds as an argument for Denmark as being administratively young and heterogeneous by 1085, I instead interpret King Cnut's letter to represent a systematic, well-functioning and well-consolidated judicial structure across the entire kingdom (e.g. Zealand and Scania), and without

any signs of it being new. This was a system which, in terms of the fundamental (settlement-) organization and related judicial matters, seems to have been structured interregionally by capable kings (e.g. Cnut IV, as Ole Fenger has previously emphasised, 1989). At the same time, this system allowed for regional differences to exist and evolve, as is evident from the archaeological findings and apparent in the later regional landscape laws (Skansjö & Sundström 1989: 126; Hansen 2015: 273; Hansen in prep).

Therefore, I suggest that the origin of the hundreds are best studied by analysing the organization and division of land (i.e. villas and hundreds) on a regional scale combining archaeology with place name studies. As far as I see, there are no strong arguments that contradict the hundred-structure to be as old as the general reorganization of settlements that led to establishing of the primary-villas around 600 AD. Rather, the evidence indicates that the hundred-structure had its origin in the time of this general reorganization (Rasmussen 1961; Hansen 2015: 177-182, 273; Hansen in prep). Consequently, I hypothesize that the impact of the thing-system (land, hundred and birk), and the concomitant introduction of simple duties and rights bound to land at different levels (e.g. hundreds, villas and hides), was the primary reason for the stable vill-structure to emerge from about 600, which is still apparent today.

Many scholars have argued for connecting an early thing-structure (hundred and land) to different kinds of military obligations, such as warfare [leading], building of fortifications and so on (Hoff 1997, Hansen 2015). As such, we should probably imagine a quite simple administrative system when compared to later periods. Nevertheless, implementing the above-mentioned administrative principle based on

land resources would naturally require some form of land assessment on quite a big scale. But how could that come about in Viking Age Denmark?

## The donation letter and land assessment

Scholars have long debated how far back in time land assessments can be indicated in Denmark. Positions vary from the seventh and eighth centuries to the mid-eleventh century (Hoff 1997:104; Venge 2002:173; Nielsen & Dalgaard 2009:190; Nielsen 2010:140; Poulsen 2011; Svensson 2015). Naturally, the few surviving written documents that indirectly indicate the existence of such fundamental administrative initiatives cannot be expected to mark the introduction of such a system. A similar case can be found in late-eleventh-century England concerning the 1085/1086 Domesday Book. As Campbell puts it: “Indeed, to the extent that Domesday is a survey for tax, with the whole land assessed in hides or carucates, it describes a fiscal machine whose existence might, without Domesday, have been asserted but hardly demonstrated” (Campbell 2000: xi).

I will argue that King Cnut's donation letter is not to be seen as an assessment in itself, but rather that its content is arranged and denoted in direct relation to an assessment structure. To claim that such administrative efforts could realistically be conducted by Danish kings prior to 1085 seems, in my opinion, reasonable when compared with the Domesday survey commissioned by King William the Conqueror that same year, which covered large parts of England. This largescale administrative survey intended to provide a survey of William's possessions of land and fiscal rights was systematically conducted within a year (Campbell 2000).

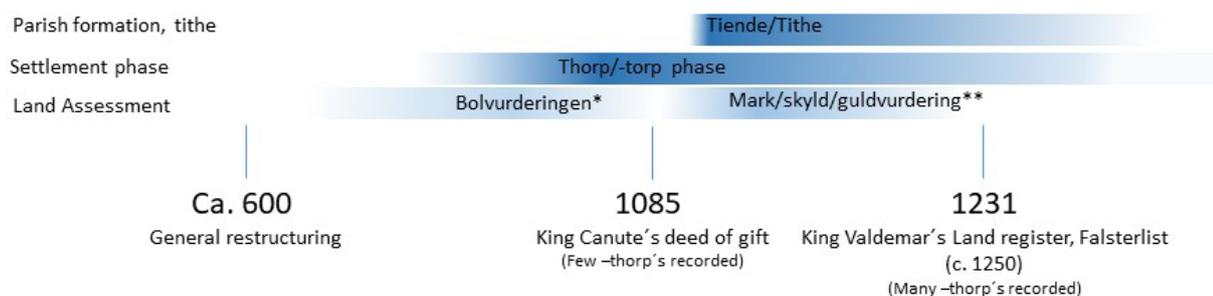
If we return to Denmark, we see, as already mentioned, that Anette Hoff operates with two land assessments at different points in time: an early mansus assessment which Hoff dates to the Viking Age, and a later gold assessment taking place in the first half of the twelfth century (Hoff 1997: 103ff). The latter was used in King Valdemar II's Land Register from the mid-thirteenth century, but not new at that time (Ibid.). The mansus assessment is much more difficult to place in time, but must, according to Hoff, still have been valid at the time of King Cnut in the late eleventh century. In any case, administrative implementation of new assessments, even though taking place within a very limited and primitive administra-

tion in the Viking Age, must be perceived as a radical change, and not as an incremental adaption.

However, a radically implemented assessment means that a fiscal structure, including entities of units and place-names, would be fixed at the time of the assessment itself. However, this does not mean that the development of settlements within the units would be fixed in a similar manner. Here we must see the two contexts individually, i.e. on the one hand the administration of duties bound to relatively large areas of land, and on the other hand the internal development of village organization.

Based on this theory of assessments, there is an inherent inconsistency between the place names recorded in the legal records (here illustrated by the donation letter from 1085) and the corpus of place names actually used, exemplified by the place name element *-thorp*, which must have been highly productive in 1085 (productive meaning, that newly outparcelled units were extensively named as *-thorp*). This inconsistency is due to the development of settlements and place names (e.g. splitting of villages, establishing of new *thorps* etc.) being first reflected in the fiscal system when a new assessment took place. Therefore, the older the land assessment is by the time a legal document is created (a document containing duties bound to the administrative system e.g. duties of war and so forth), the greater the inconsistency between the place names listed in the document and the corpus of actual names will be, at least within a settlement structure which is characterized by outparcelling. This means, in turn, that such historical documents only invariably provide a representative sample of the corpus of actual place names at the time the document is written. However, it is also this delay and inconsistency between the actual usage of place names and the implementation of those names in legal documents which theoretically can be used to qualify an estimation of the age of the actual land assessment to which a given document is subject (fig. 13).

When only one out of twenty-nine settlements contains the place name element *-thorp* in King Cnut's donation letter of 1085, compared to the fifty-one out of hundred-and-eight such names in the Falster list from c.1250 (Hoff 1997: 123), this discrepancy should not be used uncritically as an indicator of the *-thorp*-process in Eastern Denmark, as primarily having taken place after 1085. Rather, I would suggest that what we see in the 1085 donation letter is an administrative list that refers to the geographic representation of fiscal structures from an earlier assess-



\*Bolvurdering (Mansus Assessment): Viking Age (Hoff, A. 1997:104)

\*\* Mark/skyld/guldvurdering (Gold Assessment): Early 12th century (ibid: 103)

Fig. 13: Model depicting the relationship between settlement structure, place name, documents and assessments (after Hansen 2015).

ment, here called the mansus assessment. Similarly, the Falster List has been recorded on the basis of the later gold assessment, dated to the twelfth century.

I interpret the low frequency of the place name element -thorp in the 1085 donation letter as indicating that the assessment which the letter represents may be an assessment from an early stage in the primary thorp expansion (-thorp phase). As the settlement analysis based on the Funen material has shown, the beginning of the archaeological -thorp phase must be dated to the period after 800 AD, since no single farms from the previous three centuries have been excavated. Within this period, from early Viking Age until the turn of the millennium, it is difficult to assess when the -thorp phase intensified. However, I suggest that this happened in the latter part of the period. Whether the proposed mansus assessment have older layers, perhaps even going all the way back to the major restructuring around 600 AD, will probably remain unanswered due to the lack of written documents. However, both the archaeological material from Denmark and comparable documents from England, suggest that such a hypothesis should not be rejected on the basis of missing Danish documents corresponding to King Cnut's 1085 donation letter.

## Conclusion

In the present study, I have tried to interpret the structure of the content of King Cnut's donation letter in light of new results from archaeological studies and vice versa. Special focus has been on the potential of the 1085 donation letter in light of research on the existence and nature of obligations pertaining to land in Denmark in the Viking Age, such as levies in

times of war, and the building and maintenance of defences and infrastructure. My investigation combines archaeological data with a number of historical sources, and with brief comparisons to contemporary England. As demonstrated, there is a basis for reading the donation letter as being structured in close alignment with contemporary judicial realities, concretized by a thing-system which is known in greater detail from the twelfth- and thirteenth-century landscape laws.

The study has also outlined some challenges for diachronic analyses based on the place names listed in the donation letter. At the same time, it has been found that analysing the place names in the donation letter permits an estimation of the age of the theoretical mansus assessment which serves as a foundation for the listed hides in 1085. My conclusion is that the tenth century seems to be the most likely period of such an assessment.

Clearly, there is a great deal of interpretations of relationships which, as standalone arguments, are not strong enough to prove such essential settlement organizational and administrative superstructures and large-scale assessments. To strengthen research on the judicial anchoring of hides, vills and land in Denmark in the Viking Age, it will be necessary to conduct studies based on all hides, vills and administrative / judicial entities that appear in the text.

However, I am of the opinion that the combined evidence from King Cnut's donation letter and the archaeological analyses of settlements makes a strong case for the above theory, knowing that a definitive proof of assessed obligations bound to land in a proto-historical and premonetary period is difficult to find.

*Acknowledgements:* I would like to thank Steffen Hope for the English translation of the Latin text of King Cnut's donation letter as recorded in *Diplomatarium Danicum*.

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## Appendix 1

### King Cnut's Donation Letter, 1085 (transcription)

Latin (Dipl. Dan. 1.2:21). Notable differences between the three transcriptions are pointed out in the footnotes. Differences in the spelling of place names have not been included in the notes.

*In nomine sanctę et indiuidę Trinitatis. patris et filii et spiritus sancti. Notum omnibus in Christo fidelibus esse cupimus. qualiter ego Cnuto. quartus Magni regis filius. post susceptum paternę hereditatis regnum. ꝛcclesiam sancti Lavrentii. quę sita est Lundę. licet nondum perfectam dotaui. ut illius agni tollit peccata mundi sit perpetim. sponsa. sancta sancti. Immaculata immaculati. digna digni. Desponsale autem huius ꝛcclesię quod uel quale sit patefecimus. et sub his testibus. Ricualo. Svenone. Sivvardo. episcopis. Haqvino duce. presbiteris. Arnolde. Theoderico. Heinrico. Godescalco. stabulariis. Allone. Haqvino. Petro. Suenone. Ascero Akonis filio. Deo preside. ratum et ęternaliter. stabilitum desideramus. Est igitur terra illa quam Ćpi filius Thorbiorn in Lunde pro pace sua emendauit. In Upaccri australi. quattuor mansi. et dimidius. In altero Upaccri. totidem mansi. In Heruestadum octo mansi. In Scialshoge. duo mansi. In Flatoige. quinque mansi et dimidius quem dedit Hacon regi. In Hildeshoge. dimidius. In Hastathum. unus mansus. A Geri.<sup>1</sup> In Winistadum. unus mansus. In Sęfteliungum. dimidius mansus. In Seuestathum dimidius mansus.<sup>2</sup> quem persoluebat pro pace sua. Scora. Et dimidius mansus in Karlæbiu quem dedit idem Scora regi pro pace sua. In Brunleslef. dimidius quem soluebat rex a Thurgislu filio Gunstens. A Guthisbo. In Sandby. unus mansus. In Selandia. In Ramseherathi Oem. duo mansi. In Semaherathi Tiarby. duo mansi. In Tuna herathi Winningavve duo mansi. In Hornsherathi Sculdalef. unus mansus. In Othense unus mansus. In Smørhem minore. duo mansi. In Liunga herathi Broestingarythi duo mansi. In Iurlunga herathi Tollathorp. unus mansus. In Scenkilsio unus mansus. In insula Amacum. Sundby occidentali quinsus. In Brundby tres mansi. De annuali pecunia quę datur pro areis in Lumaby tres marce. De eadem pecunia in Helsingaburg tres marc. De areis Lunde. xx. marce et. i. Si quis prepotens. nobilis. uel ignobilis. natus uel non natus. contumaci inflatus audacia contra sanctę religionis propositum. huius pacti decretum uiolare studuerit. sit anathema Maranatha. sit supplicio deputatus ęterno. ubi uermis non moritur. et ignis non extinguitur.<sup>3</sup>*

*Fiat mensa eius coram ipso in laqueum et in retributiones et in scandalum. Cum eis qui dixerunt domino Deo recede a nobis. scienciam uiarum tuarum nolimus.<sup>4</sup> Quod autem ad regiam pertinet iusticiam ex quacunque causa fiat de prenomina terra. in potestate sit prepositi et cęterorum fratrum in hoc loco Deo seruiencium. Tribus culpis exceptis.<sup>5</sup> Si extra pacem positus fuerit. emat pacem a rege [quis illud emendetur]<sup>6</sup>. substanciam illius tollat prepositus et fratres. Si expedicionem neglexerit. erga regem<sup>7</sup> emendet. Reddarios equos non dent. nisi cum rex ipse uenerit. Actum Lundi duodecimo kalendas Iunii. Anno incarnationis dominice. octogesimo quinto indiccione viii epac xxii Concur. ii Anno regni domini Kanuti regis. quinto. Predictis presentibus episcopis et confirmatibus Auctore domino nostro Ihesu Christo.<sup>8</sup> Qui est benedictus in secula seculorum. Amen.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rendered as “Ageri” in the 1494 transcription. See Weibull 1925: 106.

<sup>2</sup> 1494: “vnus mansus”; 1662: dimidium mansus”. See Weibull 1925: 106.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 9:43.

<sup>4</sup> Job 21:14.

<sup>5</sup> In Necrologium Lundense, the text “Tribus cultis exceptis” is mostly lost to an erasure, and has been reconstructed from the other transcriptions. Weibull remarks that underneath the erasure can be seen “trib”, “lp”, “x”, and “ptis”. See Weibull 1925: 107.

<sup>6</sup> Only in the 1123 transcription. These three words are written upon an erasure (Weibull 1925: 107) and might therefore not be a part of the original, now lost, document, but rather an emendation made in Lund.

<sup>7</sup> 1123 and 1662: “erga regum eius” (Weibull 1925: 107). For the practice of giving horses to the royal carriage in medieval Denmark, see Lund 2015.

<sup>8</sup> 1123: Actum lunde. XII. Kal. Junij. Indiccione nona. Incarnationis dominicę. anno. millesimo. octogesimo quinto. Regni autem dominj CNVTONIS anno quitno. predictis episcopis presentibus et confirmantibus (Weibull 1925: 107).

DRB 1.2 n. 63; Dipl.Dan. 1.2 n.63 (original document)			
Document created in Lund, Jurisdiction of Scania lands-thing.			
Donated by King Erik Emune, 1135			
Vill	Designation	Jurisdiction	Geography
Västra Vram	Gärd	Gärd	Scania, secondary
Maglehem		Gärd	Scania, secondary
Hovby		Gärd	Scania, secondary
Yngsjö		Gärd	Scania, secondary
Härlöv		Gärd	Scania, secondary
Fjälkinge	Villand	Villand	Scania, secondary
Tømmerup	Amager island	Amager island (birk)	Zealand, secondary
Tårnby		Amager island (birk)	Zealand, secondary

DRB 1.2 n.64; Dipl.Dan. 1.2 n.64			
Negotiated in Næstved (jurisdiction of Zealand lands-thing, Ringsted)			
Donated by Peder Bodilsen, his brothers Hemming and Jørgen and their mother, 1135.			
Vill	Designation	Jurisdiction	Geography
Ladby		Zealand	Zealand, primary
Bukkerup		Zealand	Zealand, primary
Faksinge Ore		Zealand	Zealand, primary
Keldby	Møn Island	Møn island	Møn
Ålbæk		Møn island	Møn
Gedesby	Falster Island	Falster island	Falster
Skelby		Falster island	Falster
Vålse		Falster island	Falster
Lille Næstved		Zealand	Zealand, primary
Ladby Ore		Zealand	Zealand, primary
Torpet		Zealand	Zealand, primary
[Store] Næstved		Zealand	Zealand, primary

DRB 1.2 n.65; Dipl.Dan 1.2 n.65			
Negotiated in Ringsted (Jurisdiction of Zealand lands-thing, Ringsted)			
Donated by King Erik Emune, 1135			
Vill	Designation	Jurisdiction	Geography
Ringsted*			Zealand, primary
Bjerge			Zealand, primary
	Amager island	Amager island (birk)	Zealand, secondary
Ejby			Zealand, primary
Almstofte			Zealand, primary

DRB 1.2 n.156; Dipl.Dan. 1.2 n.156			
Document created in Zealand, Ringsted lands-thing			
Donated by King Valdemar I, 1164			
Vill	Designation	Jurisdiction	Geography
Ringsted*			Zealand, primary
Bjerge			Zealand, primary
	Amager island	Amager island (birk)	Zealand, secondary
Ejby			Zealand, primary
Almstofte/Ringsted Skov			Zealand, primary
Thislund Skov			Zealand, primary
Ringsted*			Zealand, primary
Lynge			Zealand, primary
Bjerge			Zealand, primary
Asnæs			Zealand, primary
Benløse			Zealand, primary
	Møn island	Møn island	Møn island

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hundred is used as equivalent to the Nordic herred/härad (Rasmussen 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Thing is the term for judicial assemblies with jurisdiction related to specific geographic regions (birk, hundred, land) in the Late Iron Age, the Viking Age and the Middle Ages.

<sup>3</sup> The term hide is used as equivalent to the Latin term mansus used in the donation letter, and the Danish term bol, representing parts of the vill [i.e. fields, meadows for grazing, forest] as well as the duties and rights related to the land. In the Danish context, the term does not represent any known exact measure of land. It is as such seen as a relative term when comparing between vills but at the same time consistent within the individual vill (Rasmussen 1957). The term bol is used in the Danish Landscape Laws from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

<sup>4</sup> The term "designating (hundreds)" is used in a meaning as an extra layer of addressing the individual vill (see below) e.g. In Lynge Hundred in Børstingerød. Lynge Hundred designates the vill Børstingerød.

<sup>5</sup> The vill represents an Anglo-Saxon tradition equivalent to the early Danish ejerlav. In early medieval times the vill constituted a rural village of some size including all its land (field, forest etc.). The vills were often characterized by an agrarian community. The vills also constituted the basis for the levying of men in times of war and the workforce for building and maintaining infrastructure and fortresses. The vills were represented at the hundred-thing. See Ault for the English vill (1982: 188), and Hansen for the Danish equivalent during Late Iron Age and Viking Age/European Early Middle Ages (2015: 157-172).

<sup>6</sup> The principle and value of stable management is also regarded a driving force of innovation in parts of the Carolingian world "the primary aim of ecclesiastical and royal estate management was the creation of a stable and predictable flow of goods and rent, not at what we would recognize as economic growth." (Costambeys et al. 2011: 260).

<sup>7</sup> The terms Mansus Assessment and Gold Assessment are my own translations of the Danish 'bolvurdering' (Viking Age) and 'skyld-/mark-/guldvurdering' (c. mid-twelfth century) as used by the historian Annette Hoff (1997: 102ff).

<sup>8</sup> "A thingi scilæ mæn iorth scotæ. oc æi ant stath. thæt ær a thæt hæræz thing thær iorth liggær i. æth sysæl thing. æth landz thing. æth for kunung. for thy at things witnæ ær swo stærk. at gen things witnæ skal ængi logh giuæs (Skautrup 1933: 89-90). Translated to modern Danish by Fenger & Jansen (1991). I have used the term County-thing as the equivalent of the Danish 'Sys-selting' (my translation). The syssel was primarily used in Jutland as a jurisdictional level between land and hundred.

<sup>9</sup> The listings from Liber daticus Lundensis vetustior (c.1135) and Liber daticus Lundensis recentior (fourteenth century) are not so relevant here, as they represent gifts donated after 1135 (Weeke 1989).

<sup>10</sup> The exact location of the battle is a contested issue. Both the border region between Scania and Blekinge in southern Volland hundred and, alternatively, the Mälaren area have been mentioned as possibilities (see Gräslund 1986; Moberg 1987). However, there is general support for the interpretation of the battle associated with Helgeå in Scania/Blekinge. See also Anglert

(1995: 49).

<sup>11</sup> "Den anden udi Dalby, ved nafn Henrich [Egino], skulde paavare den østre Part, oc det under Bleginde." (Huitfeldt 1604: 48).

<sup>12</sup> Weibull has emphasized how changes and deletions have been continuously made in significant numbers in the documents, and for many different reasons, i.e. adjustments, manipulations etc. (Weibull 1925).

<sup>13</sup> In several ways, Insula Amacum (Amager island) fits in the document as a land-thing in line with the small islands Møn and Falster just south of Zealand and Samsø East of Jutland (not depicted on the map fig. 10). These are precisely characterized by their, in this context, very small jurisdictions where the land-thing and the hundred-thing can coincide (Jørgensen 1969: 238). Since there is no evidence for the interpretation of the island of Amager as a land(-thing), the significance of Amager as a birke-thing is preferred. However, the possibility should in my opinion not be completely rejected, given the general historical development of jurisdictions, which over time resulted in three main juridical areas (Jutland / Funen, Zealand and Skåne), which are also reflected in the landscape laws for the same areas (Jørgensen 1969: 238). Insula Amacum is also consequently noted as designation of specific vills and hides in the prebend list from Necrologium Lundense (Lunds Universitetsbibliotek, ALVIN: Necrologium Lundense).

<sup>14</sup> Professor Emeritus Bent Jørgensen is thanked for information that Brøndby (Zealand) and Brunnby (Scania) are onomastically alike.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, it is important to bear in mind the change of donation occurring between Brundby and Lomma, shifting from regular hides in the vills to money given from plots of land in the towns.

<sup>16</sup> Peder [Bodilsen] was one of the leading men of the time and with great interest in the development of the church (Ulsig 1968: 22).

<sup>17</sup> "...illud prestes siue quod tu parrochialem ecclesiam Brundby Lundensis diocesis et quondam perpetuam uicariam in ecclesia Lundensi quarum fructus redditus et proventus quadraginta florenorum auri de Florentia secundum taxationem decime ualorem annum sicut asseritur non excedunt nosceris obtinere. (Dipl. Dan. 3.3:18). Brunnby Church's earliest history of establishment and patronage are somehow unclear. However, some medieval sources refer to such matters (cf. Schalling 1936: 121-123, 175; Åstrand 1972; Kieffer-Olsen 2018: 580, 592-593). For a broad discussion of the challenges of bringing late medieval proclamation of initiation and ownership all the way back to the church's original establishment in the early medieval period, reference is made to the latest work by Jakob Kieffer-Olsen (2018: 507-664).

<sup>18</sup> As such, it seems as if the principle of regular taxation, already well known from the plots in the towns, as clearly demonstrated by King Cnut's collect of money given each year from the plots in Lomma, Helsingborg and Lund, is also implemented in the rural context from that time on.

<sup>19</sup> On basis of further studies, it would might even be possible to suggest to narrow down the time of the gold assessment due to the recorded changes apparent in the letters of donation between 1135 and 1145 from the reigns of Erik II Emune and Erik III Lam, as mentioned earlier.

