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Layers of Life: An Archaeological Biography of Mosetet Farm, Central Norway

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This article presents a detailed archaeological reconstruction of household life at Mosetet Farm, a rural dwelling in Central Norway occupied between ca. AD 990 and 1250. Drawing on spatially recorded artefact distributions, architectural features, and formation process theory, the study examines domestic activities across three distinct phases: habitation, abandonment, and post-abandonment. The material culture includes food-related items, textile tools, and imported goods, offering insights into gendered labor, subsistence strategies, and household organization. Formation process theory is employed to interpret spatial patterns and temporal developments in household practices, contributing to broader debates on rural lifeways, social continuity, and the archaeology of deserted farms in medieval Scandinavia. By interpreting the house as a biographical entity, the article explores how material traces reflect both continuity and rupture in rural medieval life. The findings situate Mosetet within broader Scandinavian settlement patterns and contribute to discussions on rural resilience and the archaeology of everyday life.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to identify social activities such as recreational and cultural activities in rural households from the 11th century to the 16th century Central Norway by analyzing the building, the structures, and the rare and large object assemblage related to the farm at Mosetet in Overhalla municipality in Trøndelag, Norway. This will be done to gain insight into what people did in their everyday lives, that is, the repeated daily routines that have left their mark on the archaeological record.

The medieval rural household is approached as a temporal process by mapping the changes in the uses of spaces and the effects of final abandonment on the preserved material. The different usage phases in the main building at Mosetet are restored to achieve a fuller picture of everyday life and its changes at the site.

Based on the archaeological material from Mosetet, an attempt will be made to reconstruct everyday life at a medieval farm settlement, and this will provide answers to these two main questions:

What information can house remains and floor assemblages at Mosetet provide regarding organization of space and activities in a medieval rural household?
Is it possible to identify eventual change or stability at Mosetet through time?

In making the reconstruction, there are, however, important challenges. One is the lack of proper stratigraphic documentation. In the 1970s, Mosetet was one of the first rural house grounds excavated in Central Norway, before the development of the single-context method. This method was developed by Ed Harris and Paul Ottaway in England in 1976 and is an archaeological documentation technique where each unique context is recorded individually.[1] However, Mosetet was excavated using the traditional method that existed in Norway in the 1960s and 1970s—that is, mechanical or layer by layer excavation. During the excavation, the contexts were not distinguished from each other, nor described according to today's standards. Stratigraphic relations were not described, nor finds assigned to stratigraphic contexts. Only a few charcoal layers in Profile C are described as 'stratigraphically distinct'.[2] This has created difficulties in linking artefacts to separate phases.[3]

To fill in the missing information, the stratigraphic data will be reconstructed by using archaeological theories about site formation processes (SFP). SFP is a core concept in contemporary archaeology.[4] SFP are involved at every level of archaeological research, from designing research projects to interpreting variations in artefact form, assemblage composition, feature content, spatial modification, and landscape evolution.[5] Kris Hirst (2018) says that a 'good metaphor for an archaeological site is a *palimpsest*, a medieval manuscript that has been written on, erased and written over, again and again, and again'. With knowledge of how formation processes affect the character of objects and refuse in the various stages of a house's life cycle, a retrospective analysis could be performed of the assemblage at Mosetet to interpret specific activities and activity areas.

Despite these factors, this site still presents one of the finest medieval rural houses excavated in this region, measured by the standards of the time. The combination of house and midden is rare in the regional rural settlements from this period.[6] For-

[1] E.g., Museum of London Archaeology Service 1994; Sandoval 2021.

[2] Møllenhus 1970a.

[3] 1975; 1970b; 1970c; Alterskjær 1971.

[4] E.g., Schiffer 1996.

[5] Sullivan and Dibble 2014.

[6] Compared to e.g., the North Norwegian settlement mounds, cf Bertelsen 2019; 2023; 2015; Martens 2016b; 2016a; Wickler 2016.

tunately, the spatial distribution of artefact finds was meticulously recorded during the excavation. However, the lack of stratigraphic documentation means that the relative dating aspect is missing from this site. This creates difficulties in researching the temporal aspects of the activities in this household, i.e., distinguishing what took place in earlier and later phases and stages of the settlement.

My hypothesis is that the characteristics of objects resulting from the specific formation processes could be superimposed on the Mosetet assemblage, thus making it possible to interpret not only where activities took place, but also when. In this way, one can distinguish between activities committed by the residents in the habitation stage, activities performed at the time of abandonment, and cultural and natural processes that affected the building mass and assemblage after the house was abandoned.

Methodical and theoretical approach

The steps of the analysis

Before describing the methods used to analyse the Mosetet assemblage, the sequence in which they were applied is outlined here. To identify activity areas, the analysis was inspired by the steps proposed by LaMotta & Schiffer (1999). However, due to the absence of established contexts and stratigraphy at Mosetet, the sequence suggested by Pfälzner (2015) was adapted to better suit the material. This provided an alternative approach to the assemblage. The first step—recording the artefact positions—was carried out during excavation and later digitally re-recorded on the site plan. The next step involved reconstructing the actions that led to specific object clusters,[7] by interpreting the formation processes that shaped the assemblage.

Formation processes on house floor assemblages

When interpreting activities and functions based on archaeological finds, it is crucial to consider the formation processes that influence how artefacts are distributed. While artefact locations are often assumed to reflect activity zones during a building's use, these patterns may be shaped by less visible processes. LaMotta and Schiffer (1999) outline three stages in a dwelling's life: use, abandonment, and post-abandonment. Throughout these stages, accretion (object deposition) and depletion (object removal or absence) affect the assemblage. Understanding these processes helps clarify which activities the finds represent, when they occurred, and whether the distribution accurately reflects the household's life.

[7] Pfälzner 2015: 33.

LaMotta & Schiffer identified fourteen processes affecting house floor assemblages; only those relevant to Mosetet are discussed here. During habitation, *primary and loss refuse deposition* occurs when items are discarded or accidentally lost in their place of use, though this is rare since most activity areas are regularly cleaned.[8] *Secondary refuse deposition* involves removing refuse from activity areas and discarding it elsewhere, such as in a midden, thus preventing in-house accumulation.[9] *Provisional refuse deposition* is when broken or worn objects are stored for potential reuse, usually along walls or under furniture rather than in central activity zones. Overall, habitation-stage processes at Mosetet likely left little cultural material inside the house (Table 1).

Stage	Accretion process	Depletion process
Habitation	Primary and loss refuse deposition	Secondary refuse deposition
	Provisional refuse deposition	
Abandonment	*De facto* refuse deposition	Curation
	Ritual refuse deposition	Ritual depletion
Post-abandonment	Re-use refuse deposition	Scavenging
	Secondary refuse deposition	Disturbance
	Structural collapse	Decay
	Disturbance	

Table 1: Formation processes on house floor assemblages (after LaMotta and Schiffer 1999:20).

However, during the next stage, the abandonment stage, both household activities and deposition patterns change, which may lead to greater cultural deposition. *De facto refuse deposition* is an accretion process where still usable objects are abandoned. Objects most likely to be left behind are 'difficult to transport, easy to replace, and/or have little residual utility'.[10] The rate of abandonment may be the most influential factor for this process. Rapid and unplanned abandonment (e.g., catastrophic abandonment in the form of a house fire) usually leaves behind a larger and different assemblage than slow and planned abandonment. During this process, tools, facilities, structures, and other cultural materials are left behind although they might still be usable or reusable.[11]

[8] LaMotta & Schiffer 1999: 21.

[9] Milek 2012b: 105.

[10] LaMotta and Schiffer 1999: 22.

In the post-abandonment stage, *structural collapse* may add building materials to the assemblage, while disturbance (e.g., bioturbation) can also introduce material.[12] Three processes may deplete assemblages: *scavenging, disturbance and decay* (including faunal/floral activity, organic decay, pot hunting, and excavation), and *cryoturbation* in cold climates.[13] These processes show that floor finds do not always directly reflect habitation activities. Later stages—especially abandonment and post-abandonment—can significantly alter assemblages by adding, removing, or disturbing material.

Study of activity areas

The spatial relationships between objects, architecture, and archaeological features are key to understanding the social organisation of the household at Mosetet, since this may bring 'insights into the nature and distribution of household activities, and into relationships between social action and material culture'.[14] Milek writes that archaeologists seeking to spatially analyse residues in floor deposits to infer site activity areas must carefully consider all possible origins of these residues and the various reasons for their deposition.[15]

Defining activity areas at Mosetet is thus necessary to gain insight into how the inhabitants used the house daily over the years, and what social actions we can read out of the finds' distribution on the site.

Presentation of Mosetet farm

Area description and cultural-historical background of Mosetet

The focus of this paper is the Mosetet farm, situated in the Overhalla municipality of Northern Trøndelag.[16] Only the main building was excavated. Mosetet was situated on Brennmoen on a flat moraine plateau, ca. 95 m.a.s.l. (Fig. 1). The terrain slopes down towards the river Namsen to the north. On the till (no.: *moen*) within there is no good arable land; the area consists of sand with a thin layer of soil on top, so that after cultivation one must use fertilizer skillfully to get sufficient yield. Near the foot of the slope below the terrace where Mosetet was located, and SSW of the excavation area, are several lynchets, indicating that at least this slope was used for

[11] Schiffer 1996: 89-91.

[12] LaMotta and Schiffer 1999: 24-25.

[13] Schiffer 1996: 213-214; Wood and Johnson 1978.

[14] Allison 2008: 1456.

[15] Milek 2012a: 135.

[16] Riksantikvaren n.d., 38065.

farming.[17] In recent times, the slope has been used for the cultivation of cattle feed. A little further towards the WSW there is a still active water source.[18] Several heritage sites are registered here. Two sites with possible traces of house grounds are found nearby.[19] None of these sites have been excavated or dated, and their temporal relation to Mosetet is unclear. Large and small burial mounds are scattered around the periphery, more than 120 within a radius of 1.5km. Most of them are dated to the Iron Age and precedes the building. Remains of holloways exists too, at least five are registered and formed a kind of crossroads a few hundred meters N of Mosetet. The holloways may be contemporary with Mosetet (Fig. 1).

The 200km long river Namsen is the centre of the rural Namdalen valley, originating in the mountains in the east, and ending at the Namsen fjord in the west where the small town of Namsos lies today. The valley contains river plains where grass production for cattle and pigs is dominant, surrounded by rich coniferous forests and low mountains. The river has several tributaries, reaching far inland. The area along the river Namsen has a remarkably high density of Iron Age burial mounds. The rich heritage along the river as well as the lush coniferous forests has led to a hypothesis that the area was a wealthy boat-building district in the Iron Age, supplying settlements along the entire coast of Norway.[20]

The excavations

The main building at Mosetet was excavated over the span of five years, from 1967 to 1971, except for the summer of 1968 (Fig. 2-5). The finished excavated area measured approximately 16x7m. The excavation therefore took place in a limited area, and it is not known whether there might be additional buildings on the farm. The excavation uncovered the remains of one building as well as a midden immediately outside the house. Both the house and the midden contained artefacts. Short reports were written for each excavation season,[21] and an article aimed at wider audiences was published in a local yearbook by the excavator in charge.[22]

[17] Møllenhus 1975: 65.

[18] Møllenhus 1975: 64; Riksantikvaren, 38065.

[19] Riksantikvaren n.d., 122930 and 46624.

[20] Pettersen 1980.

[21] Alterskjær 1971; Møllenhus 1970b; 1967; 1970c.

[22] Møllenhus 1975.

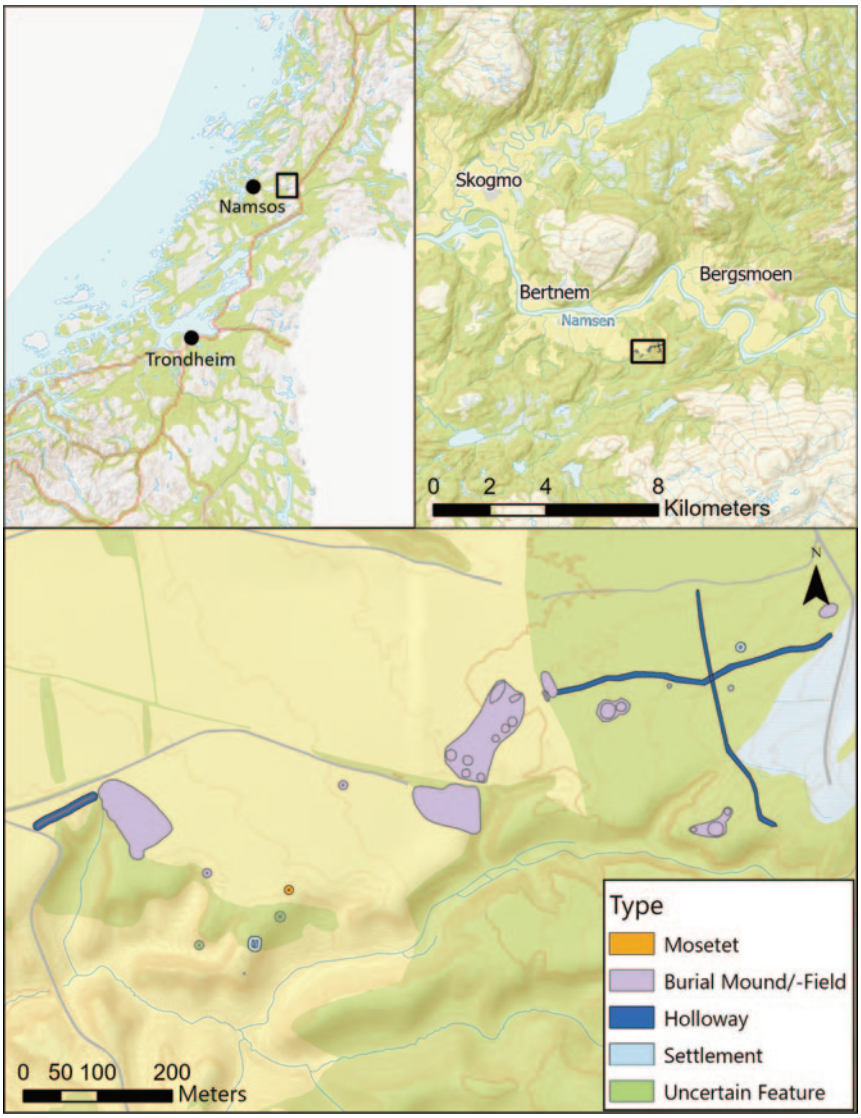


Fig. 1: Mosetet is situated in Overhalla municipality, Trøndelag county, Central Norway. Map made by Eivind M. F. Krag 2024.

Presentation of the archaeological material

The construction

The building at Mosetet Farm measured approximately 12 × 5 meters, totalling around 60 m², and was divided into three rooms. The largest room, located in the western part of the structure, measured 6 × 5 meters, while the smaller eastern room was 4 × 5 meters. Between these two rooms, a central raised platform of hard-packed sand, measuring 2 × 5 meters, likely functioned as a hallway or anteroom. Its placement and composition suggest it may have been used for temporary storage, possibly for tools.[23]

Remains of wooden logs were found outlining the building's perimeter, interpreted as sill logs typical of corner-notched timber construction (Norwegian: *laft*). This technique provided solid and stable structures, offering excellent indoor climate and insulation when the logs were properly fitted and the joints carefully crafted. It also allowed for vertical expansion by adding additional tiers of logs.[24] Supporting this interpretation, sill stones were identified in the northeastern and southwestern corners,[25] with pine being the primary material used for both the sill logs and possibly the overall framework.

Phosphate analysis confirmed habitation, with the highest values found within the building's footprint.[26] Although no doorways were preserved, a flat stone slab (1 × 0.7 m) located 60 cm from the northern wall and aligned with the hallway was interpreted as a door slab, suggesting an entrance. No similar features were found elsewhere on the site (Fig. 2 and 5).[27]

The features inside the building

Photos from Mosetet revealed a flat stone slab construction in the south-eastern corner of the western room, serving as a foundation for a corner hearth. In the eastern room, an angled stone foundation marked the location of a hearth in the south-western corner. A deposit of charcoal and fire-cracked stones spread throughout the house, particularly concentrated in the south-eastern part of the western room.

[23] Møllenhus 1975: 62.

[24] Olsen 2009.

[25] Møllenhus 1975: 61.

[26] Møllenhus 1975: 60.

[27] Møllenhus 1975: 62.

Møllenhus proposed that these were brewing stones, re-used to create a dry, solid floor surface.[28]

Fig. 2: Tower photo of Mosetet during excavation. The door slab can be seen at the north-western edge of the image. Photo: K. R. Møllenhus 1971 (NTNU University Museum CC BY-SA 4.0).

Excavation photos suggested that the eastern room's original floor was compact sand, appearing slightly sunken compared to the hallway. Section drawings (e.g., section C, Fig. 4) indicated alternating sandy layers and archaeological deposits, pointing to a repeatedly improved floor surface through the addition of drier soils, a process known as trampling. In the western room, the floor likely consisted of brewing stones over sand, creating a paved surface.

The midden

Immediately to the north-west of the house, the excavators discovered an area with fire-cracked stones and charcoal that contained several artefact finds. This was inter-

[28] Møllenhus 1975: 63.

Fig. 3: The scene shows the excavation of Mosetet in 1971. The large, flat plain in the background is Brennmoen. Photo: K. R. Møllenhus 1971 (NTNU University Museum CC BY-SA 4.0).

preted as a midden. [29] The excavators did not supply information on the size of the midden, but judging by the extent of the finds in this area, the midden measured approximately 23m² (Fig. 5).

A high-altitude excavation at Vesle Hjerkinn, Dovre, Innlandet County,[30] uncovered five dwellings and a phosphate-rich midden containing food waste, including fish remains and split bones.[31] Comparable middens are also known from urban excavations in Oslo and Trondheim.[32]

[29] Alterskjær 1971: 4.

[30] Riksantikvaren n.d., 79613.

[31] Weber 1986; 1987; 2007.

[32] Cf Keller and Schia 1994; Christophersen and Nordeide 1994; Schia 1991.

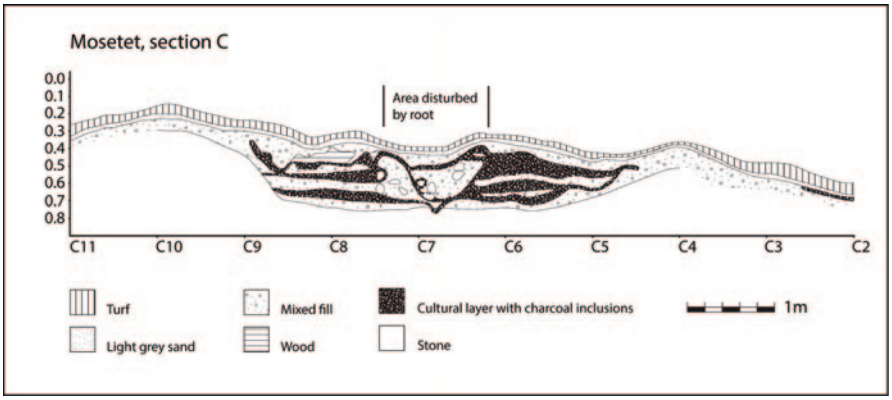


Fig. 4: Section C of the floor, drawn by M. Mokkelbost, after Møllenhus & Alterskjær 1971.

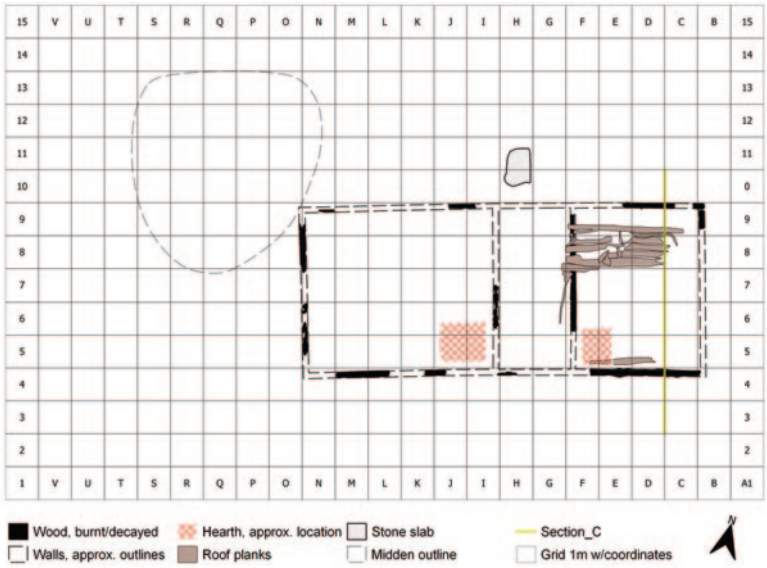


Fig. 5: Plan of features at Mosetet with section C and grid coordinates. I have interpreted two hearths on the floor, both are included. Midden to the upper left. Drawn by M. Mokkelbost, based on field drawings by Alterskjær/Damstuen 1971.

The dates

Vestrum (2009) dated four undated charcoal samples from the Mosetet excavation, essential for understanding the house's habitation stage. The most reliable sample, TUa-7385, was taken from the second-lowest layer in the eastern room and indicated an 80% probability of construction between AD 990 and 1050. While the house could have been erected earlier, the lifespan of wooden buildings is inherently limited due to factors such as rot and fire. The other three samples suggested usage continuing into the start or middle of the 13th century (Fig. 6).

This timeframe is supported by additional finds, including nine Norwegian bracteates dated to AD 1100–1150 found near the north wall of the eastern room, indicating a possible deposition around AD 1150.[33] Imported ceramics, likely London-type ware, found in the hallway and dated to the early 13th century further suggest the house was occupied until at least the early 1200s.[34]

The finds

During the four excavation seasons the excavators found a lot of objects both within the house and in the midden NW of the house.[35] There were 1144 artefacts altogether, according to the catalogue which was revised in 2017.[36] For a better overview of artefacts and placement, the artefacts at the site are here presented within six different main contexts (Table 2). Fig. 7 shows the frequency map of all artefacts finds, including the midden (Fig. 7).

The analyses

Assessment of formation processes on the Mosetet house floor assemblage

To define activity areas at Mosetet, it is essential to identify functional types based on specific uses rather than form or chronology.[37] Sæbjørg W. Nordeide's classification of medieval Nidaros artefacts by function provides a foundation for analysing the assemblage at Mosetet (Table 3).[38]

[33] Eikje Ramberg 2017: 51, 56.

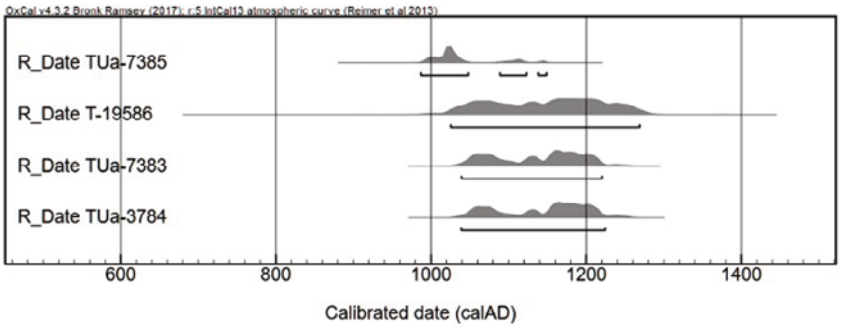
[34] Reed 1990; Vestrum 2009.

[35] Møllenhus 1975.

[36] T19288, NTNU University Museum.

[37] Darvill 2000, 2003.

[38] Nordeide 1989.



Labn°.	Context	Dated material	Date BP	Calibrated age span (OxCal v4.3.2, IntCal13, 95.4%)
TUa-7385	Eastern room, possible heart, 2nd lowest layer in section C, square C6/C7	Birch *(Betula)*	1000 + 25	**AD 987-1149** (987-1048calAD (79.1%), 1089-1123calAD (13.4%), 1138-1149calAD (2.9%))
T-19586	Eastern room, cultural layer, top layer in section C, square C6/C7	Spruce *(Picea)*	870 + 75	**AD 1025-1260** (1025-1260calAD (95.4%))
TUa-7383	Eastern room, possible hearth, bottom layer in section C, square C6/C7	Birch, willlow, aspen *(Betula, Salix, Populus tremula)*	885 + 35	**AD 1039-1220** (1039-1220calAD (95.4%))
TUa-3784	Eastern room, possible hearth, bottom layer in section C, square C6/C7	Birch *(Betula)*	880 + 35	**AD 1039-1224** (1039-1224calAD (95.4%))

Fig. 6. OxCal plot and table of dates. OxCal multiple plots of recalibration of reliable dating samples from the possible hearth in the eastern room, OxCal v4.3.2, IntCal13 (Bronk Ramsey 2001; Reimer et al. 2013). Dates recalibrated May 2020, by M. Mokkelbost.

Object	*East. room*	*West. room*	*Hallway*	*Midden*	*Outside*	*Unknown location*	*SUM*
Bead, glass and clay		2		2			**4**
Birch bark fragments						50	**50**
Bone, burnt		10				2	**12**
Bone, unburnt	38			77	1		**116**
Clay, burnt	83	95				114	**292**
Coin, silver, bracteate	9						**9**
Coin, silver, dirham					1		**1**
Comb, fragment	1			1	1		**3**
Disc, burnt clay		2		1			**3**
Fire steel, iron	1						**1**
Flint flake	3		1	5	2		**11**
Flint piece	7	24		4	2		**37**
Flint fragment	1	2		1			**4**
Fire flint	1	5		9	1		**16**
Flint knoll	1	3		1	1		**6**
Fragment, bronze	7	4		13			**24**
Fragment, glass				1			**1**
Fragment, iron	73	159	16	49	17	16	**330**
Fragment, slate			1				**1**
Game piece	1	1					**2**
Hook, iron	1						**1**
Iron fittings		1		1			**2**
Knife, iron		2		1			**3**
Loom weight, soapstone		1					**1**
Nail, iron	4	1		2	1		**8**
Ring, iron		1					**1**
Ring, bronze		1					**1**
Rivet, iron	3	9	2	6	1		**21**
Rock crystal	1						**1**
Sample, charcoal	12		2	1		1	**16**
Sickle, iron		1					**1**
Slag, iron					1		**1**
Slag, glass		1					**1**
Spindle, iron		1		1			**2**
Spindle whorl, burnt clay	4	9	1	2	1		**17**
Spindle whorl preform, burnt clay, fragments	54						**54**
Staple, iron	1						**1**
Stick/peg, wood, burnt	1						**1**
Unknown, bronze	2			1			**3**
Unknown, soapstone				1			**1**
Unknown, iron		4		1	2		**7**
Unknown, slate			2				**2**
Unknown, iron/wood	1						**1**
Vessel, ceramic, fragments			8				**8**
Vessel, soapstone fragment	18	6		4	3		**31**
Wheel, burnt clay	1						**1**
Wheel, soapstone				1			**1**
Whetstone	15	9	1	5	2	1	**33**
SUM	***344***	***354***	***34***	***191***	***37***	***184***	***1144***

Table 2: Contexts and finds, alphabetically sorted, T19288.

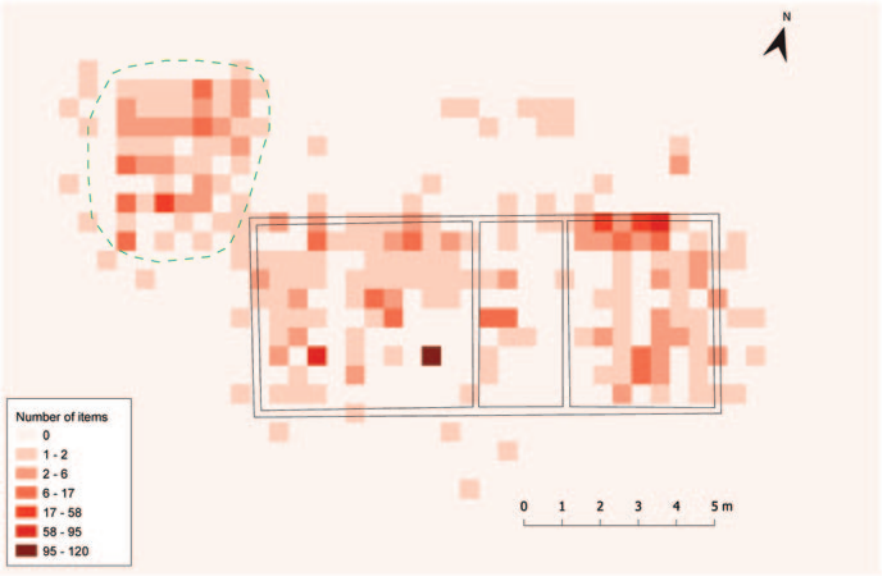


Fig. 7: Frequency of all finds (T19288). The building of Mosetet on the right, the midden dashed in green on the upper left. Map made with QGIS, by M. Mokkelbost.

Food-related objects, such as cooking and drinking vessel fragments, along with animal bones, represent standard household functions. Food preparation and consumption are central to cultural identity.[39]

Textile-related items, including needles and spindle whorls, signal craft activities. Flint flakes are included as cutting tools due to their use in textiles. In a Viking age pit house excavated at Ørland in 2014, remains of a small wooden box containing a sewing needle and a flint flake were found.[40] Textile production at Mosetet was likely for household use only.

Farming artefacts signify agricultural tasks, with evidence of a sickle and 33 whetstones for sharpening tools. The variety of materials indicates adaptability in tool production. Trade-related items include coins, imports, and prestige goods. Some artefacts serve multiple functions, like glass beads and fragments of a British pottery

[39] Øye 2009: 225.

[40] Mokkelbost and Sauvage 2015, T26288: 44.

vessel (probably a pitcher) with green glaze in which some kind of fluid may have been stored. A burnt wooden peg's exact function remains unclear.

Artefacts with known functions helped interpret activity areas during habitation, while those from the abandonment stage provided insights into daily activities at that time. The midden represented a specific area for refuse disposal.

Activity group	Indicated function	Object
Household/dwelling	Food related objects	animal bone; burnt and unburnt
		animal teeth
		fire steel/striker, iron
		flints
		fragment of drinking glass
		hook, iron
		vessel fragments (pottery sherds, soapstone/steatite fragments)
	Games	game pieces, clay
	Personal	beads, glass & clay
		combs, bone
		fire steel/striker, iron
		knifes, iron
		ring, bronze
		ring, iron
	Tools	whetstones, shaly rock
Crafts	Carpentry	drill wheel, soapstone
	Textile production	loom weight, soapstone
		spindles, iron
		spindle whorls, burnt clay
		spindle whorl preform, burnt clay
Trade	Money	coin, dirham
		coins, Norwegian bracteates
	Personal equipment	beads, glass
	Food preparation	fragment, drinking glass
		vessel fragments (pottery, soapstone)
	Objects made of or containing bronze	combs with bronze inlays/rivets
		bronze ring
		bronze fragments
		unknown bronze items
Agriculture	Farming	sickle, iron
	Maintenance of steel edges	whetstones of different types of rocks
n/a		clay, burnt
		flint
		iron fitting
		iron fragment
		nails/rivets, fragments included; iron
		rock crystal
		stick/peg, wood, burnt

Table 3: Functions indicated by artefacts found at Mosetet (T19288).

Stage 1: The use (habitation) stage

During the habitation stage, primary and loss refuse deposition contributed significantly to the artefact assemblage at Mosetet. Although microartefact studies were not conducted in this 50-year-old excavation, smaller items could be considered as such. The western room had a paved floor that may have allowed small objects to fall through, while the eastern room's sandy floor likely enabled items larger than 1 mm to be trampled in.[41] Milek noted that artefacts larger than 10–20 mm may be less reliable for understanding spatial organization.[42] However, the penetrable sandy floor may also have allowed larger items to be deposited, leading to a size limit of 3 cm for considering items resulting from primary and loss refuse deposition (Table 4).

Iron fragments and unknown iron items were often poorly preserved, showing wear and rounded shapes. The same applies to bronze fragments. A 5 cm slate fragment was flat and lacked sharp edges, making it less visible on the dirt floor. Small, rounded soapstone vessel fragments also resulted from primary and loss refuse deposition.

Burnt bone and flint fragments were small enough to go unnoticed during the occupation phase. Ten burnt animal bone fragments were found near the northern wall of the western room, which also showed a concentration of flint fragments used for striking fire. This supports the interpretation of a hearth in the largest room, essential for winter heating. Evidence of extensive textile production in the same room further suggests it likely contained a hearth, probably in the eastern corner.[43]

Several animal teeth (unburnt bone) were found in the eastern room, likely as slaughter waste from the preparation of meat from animal heads, such as tongue and brain used in dishes and sausages.[44] These dishes were prepared indoors, which explains the presence of the teeth. The teeth probably came from sheep or goats. An iron hook was also found, possibly part of a pot hanger.[45]

An imported pottery vessel was found in the hallway, likely used for storing and serving liquids. The hallway may have offered a cooler environment than the eastern room, making it suitable for storage. The vessel may have broken after the building was abandoned, possibly during a fire.The wooden stick or peg may have served as a practical fixture for hanging tools, household items, or clothing.

[41] Schiffer 1996:126-128.

[42] Milek 2012b: 105.

[43] Cf Finstad 2009: 125.

[44] Weber 1990: 79ff.

[45] Weber 1990: 258.

Fragmented or small whetstones (<3 cm) may have remained undetected on the soft, sandy floor of the eastern room. In contrast, larger whetstones would have been more visible and thus more likely to be retrieved for reuse or removed during cleaning. No whetstones were recovered from the western room, suggesting that primary and loss-related refuse deposition affected only one of the twenty-five whetstones found within the house (Fig. 8).

Stage 2: The abandonment stage

De facto refuse deposition contributed significantly to the floor assemblage at Mosetet. This process involves the abandonment of still-usable objects, typically those that are difficult to transport, easy to replace, or of limited residual utility.[46] However, these criteria pertain to planned abandonment scenarios. At Mosetet, the abandonment was abrupt and unplanned, likely resulting from a destructive fire—characteristic of catastrophic abandonment. In such cases, not all criteria apply, yet the core principle remains that usable objects may still be left behind.

Due to the absence of stratigraphic relationships at Mosetet, it was not possible to determine which items were deposited last. Furthermore, many objects—particularly those made of metal, clay, or stone—have undergone significant decay over the 700–800 years since the site was abandoned, likely exacerbated by the fire. This deterioration complicates efforts to identify original form and function, and thus to distinguish between *de facto* refuse and primary or loss-related deposition during habitation.

To address this, specific criteria were applied to identify *de facto* refuse: fragmented items that remained in one location likely escaped disturbance during habitation and were left behind during *rapid abandonment*. Larger fragments (>3 cm) would have been noticed and removed during occupation, suggesting their presence reflects abandonment. Similarly, objects too large or regular to be overlooked, yet small enough to be portable, were interpreted as remnants of *catastrophic abandonment*. Items with fresh breaks—possibly caused during excavation in the 1970s—were also included. Finally, the presence of valuable objects, which would typically be removed in a planned abandonment, strongly supports a scenario of sudden, catastrophic abandonment.

None of the objects left behind at Mosetet were difficult to transport. While many items—such as clay discs, game chips, spindle whorls, and the clay wheel—were easily replaceable, their presence suggests both planned and rapid abandonment. For most fragmented objects (excluding coins, comb, iron fragments, spindle whorls,

[46] LaMotta and Schiffer 1999: 22.

Small items of max. 3 cm in length	**Number/frag.**
Beads	two
Bone, burnt, fragments	10 fragmented animal teeth
Bone, unburnt, fragments	38 fragmented animal teeth
Clay, burnt,	178 fragments
Flint flakes	four
Flint pieces	31
Flint fragments	three
Flints	six
Flint nodules	four
Fragments, bronze	11
Fragments, iron	247
Fragment, slate	one
Iron fittings	one
Nails	one
Ring, bronze	one
Rivet	13
Rock crystal	one
Slag, glass	one
Spindle whorls	three incomplete, 54 frag. of unknown number
Staple, iron	one
Unknown, bronze	two
Unknown, iron	two
Unknown, slate	one
Vessel, ceramic	eight fragments
Vessel, soapstone	one fragment
Whetstones	one

Table 4: Small items of max. 3 cm in length (T19288).

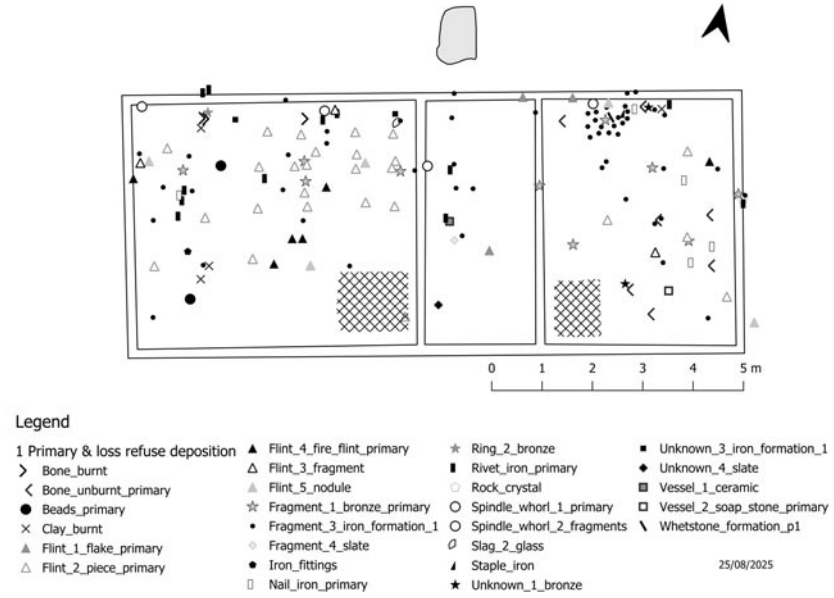


Fig. 8: Plan of small items from the habitation stage, affected by primary and loss refuse deposition (T19288). The hearths are marked with a checkered pattern. Map made with QGIS, by M. Mokkelbost.

pottery and soapstone vessels, clay wheel, and whetstones), all fragments were recovered, many showing fresh breaks. All items except coins exceeded 3 cm in size, and several had regular shapes, making them unlikely to be overlooked. The presence of valuables, including coins and a bone comb with bronze inlays, further supports a scenario of sudden departure (Fig. 9).

Stage 3: The post-abandonment stage

During the post-abandonment phase at Mosetet, spanning 700–800 years, multiple formation processes impacted the assemblage and structures. Structural collapse was evident through the presence of roof materials such as planks and birch bark, and a stone layer originating from fallen hearth superstructures. Scavenging may also have occurred, particularly affecting organic materials like textiles and wooden implements, which were absent—though both scavenging and decay are plausible causes.

Fig. 9: Plan of items from the abandonment stage, affected by de facto refuse deposition (T19288). The hearths are marked with a checkered pattern. Map made with QGIS, by M. Mokkelbost.

Decay was clearly visible on metals and organic remains, including heavily deteriorated animal bones and teeth.

Disturbance processes further altered the assemblage. Section drawings and written documentation reported of floralturbation by tree roots. Cryoturbation was also a factor that affected the assemblage at Mosetet – the climate so far inland in Central Norway is quite cold during winter. Additionally, the excavation itself contributed to depletion, as artefacts, features, and soils were removed entirely.

Summary of all three stages (use/habitation, abandonment, and post-abandonment)

At Mosetet, two formation processes influenced the assemblage during the habitation stage. The only accretion process identified was *primary and loss refuse deposition*. Although typically rare and minimally traceable in-house floor assemblages, the soft

dirt floor in the eastern room and the paved floor in the western room facilitated the preservation of several objects in their likely locations of use, allowing for a basic analysis of activity areas.

A distinct depletion process—*secondary refuse deposition*—was also evident, as household waste had been removed and deposited in a nearby midden. The identification of this midden confirms the operation of this process.

During the brief and unplanned abandonment stage, a fire likely caused a catastrophic abandonment. This resulted in the retention of numerous objects, including valuable ones, on the house floor—indicating a clear instance of *de facto* refuse deposition.

In the post-abandonment stage, *structural collapse* was the only confirmed accretion process, contributing construction materials to the assemblage. No other accretion processes were observed at this single-phase site.

Distinguishing between depletion processes such as scavenging and long-term decay is challenging. Scavenging or rescue shortly after the fire may be indistinguishable from the effects of nearly a millennium of decay. However, decay clearly impacted the assemblage, particularly organic materials. Additionally, the excavation itself contributed to depletion through the removal of artefacts, features, and soils.

Analysis of activity areas at Mosetet

Activity areas during habitation stage

The small artefacts identified through primary and loss refuse deposition during the habitation stage were generally non-specific in function, making activity interpretation challenging. However, a few items reflected identifiable functions and helped delineate activity areas, both at room level and within smaller zones. Food-related activities were most clearly indicated, followed by textile production.

Textile-related artefacts consisted solely of three spindle whorls, concentrated along the northern walls of both main rooms, possibly indicating preferred spinning locations. Personal equipment was limited to two beads and a small bronze ring; all found in the western room and too dispersed to define a specific activity area. Farming-related artefacts were nearly absent, with only one whetstone recovered, preventing identification of a related activity zone.

Trade and exchange-related artefacts were evenly distributed in the eastern room, while in the western room they showed a slight concentration along an east–west axis approximately 1.2 m from the northern wall (Fig. 10).

Due to poor preservation conditions, most artefacts at Mosetet could not be typologically classified, making it impossible to determine whether the midden reflected earlier habitation phases. Nonetheless, the midden clearly represented many of the same household activities observed inside the house. This pattern aligns with findings from Viking Age and Medieval farm mounds in Northern Norway.[47]

Like the house, the Mosetet midden contained few personal adornments and textile implements. However, it offered a broader range of artefacts, including a comb, a spindle, and a possible spindle whorl preform (clay disc), enriching the interpretation of textile and personal activities. Food-related items included soapstone vessel fragments and animal teeth, similar to those found inside the house. Notably, the midden also contained a fragment of a glass drinking vessel—absent from the house—which, along with bronze items and a glass bead fragment, suggests moderate wealth and access to imports.

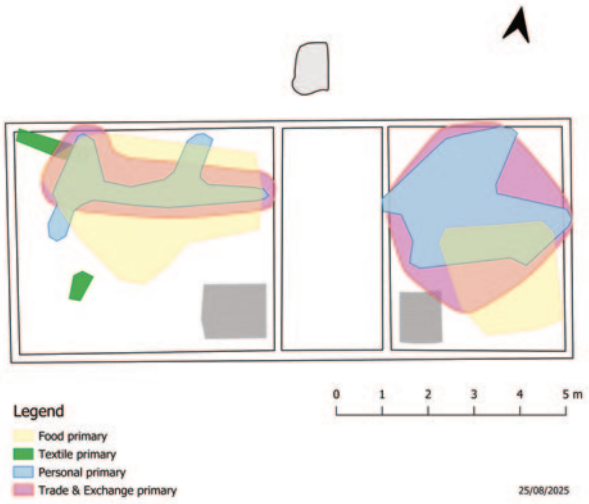


Fig. 10: The figure shows the activity areas from the habitation stage in the main building during excavation (T19288). Yellow area: food related items. Green area: textile related items. Blue area: personal related items. Pink area: trade and exchange related items. Map made with QGIS, by M. Mokkelbost.

[47] Bertelsen 1989:178-179; Bertelsen and Urbańczyk 1985; Lund 1957; Wickler 2016.

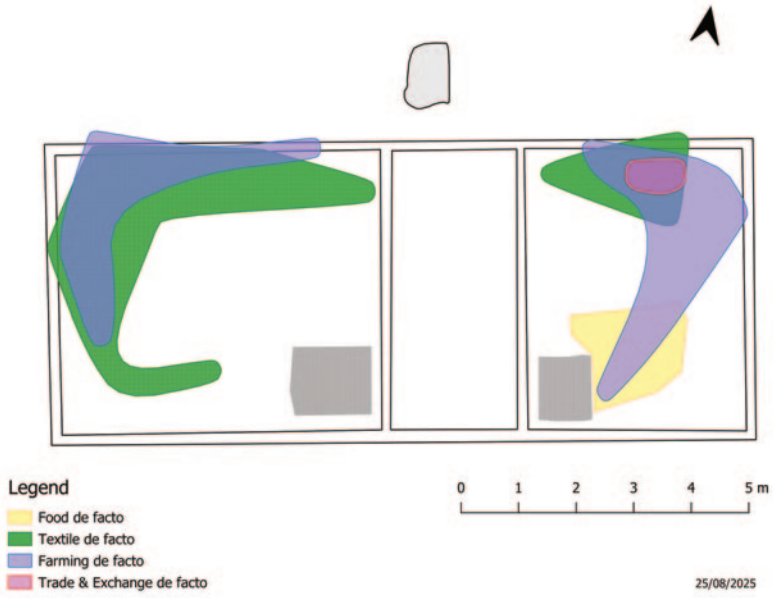


Fig. 11: The figure shows the activity areas from the abandonment/destruction stage in the main building during excavation (T19288). Yellow area: food related items. Green area: textile related items. Blue area: personal related items. Pink area: trade and exchange related items.' Map made with QGIS, by M. Mokkelbost.

Additionally, a drill wheel found in the midden points to specialised carpentry, not otherwise evident in the house. This raises the possibility of wood carving on furniture or inventory, as discussed by Christophersen & Nordeide.[48]

Overall, while the house floor assemblage provided valuable insights into habitation activities, the midden offered a more comprehensive view of the site's functional complexity.

Activity areas during abandonment/destruction stage

Analysis of refuse from the abandonment/destruction stage revealed that the artefacts were larger and more specific, making it easier to determine their functions. Food-related activities were notably denser during this stage, with stronger indications of

[48] Christophersen & Nordeide 1994: 162-197, 235-241.

textile and farming activities as well. Artefacts related to food were mainly found in the eastern room, where cooking vessels were stacked near the hearth, indicating cooking activity. Vessel fragments in the western room suggested storage, although some cooking may have occurred there as well.

Textile-related artefacts were notably abundant in the abandonment stage at Mosetet, suggesting that textile production was actively ongoing at the time of the fire. This provides reliable spatial indicators for such activities. Seven spindle whorls were found in the western room, positioned along the walls or approximately 1 m from them, while four were located along the northern wall of the eastern room. The placement of whorls near wall lines suggests they may have been stored on shelves or hanging pegs, while those found further into the room were likely left on benches after use. This distribution indicates that at least four whorls were actively in use shortly before the fire.

Additional textile-related items from the abandonment stage were found in the western room, though none were located directly in wall lines, reinforcing the interpretation that textile work occurred near the walls—possibly on earthen benches.[49] A loom weight found near the north-eastern corner further supports the presence of a warp-weighted loom in that area (see Fig. 9 and 11).

Personal equipment recovered through *de facto* refuse included two iron knives in the western room and a fragmented bone comb with bronze inlays near the hearth in the eastern room. These few items are insufficient to define a distinct activity area.

Farming-related items included nine whetstones found along the northern and western walls of the western room, possibly accumulating in low-traffic zones, as suggested by Milek.[50] In the eastern room, fourteen whetstones were concentrated in the north-eastern corner, which may indicate a meat-cutting area requiring sharp tools, rather than simple storage.

Trade and exchange-related items, though few, were notable and all located in the eastern room. The silver bracteates, for instance, were found clustered near the northern wall. The concentrated cluster of silver coins near the northern wall of the eastern room may indicate that they were stored on a shelf along this wall, similar to the spindle whorls from the same period. It is possible that the coins were kept in a purse or a small container.

[49] Cf Christophersen and Nordeide 1994.

[50] Milek 2012a: 133.

Discussion

What kind of place was Mosetet?

Mosetet farm was situated on a sandy ridge, cleared of branches and debris, typical of medieval Norwegian landscapes where farmers manually removed trees and roots to prepare the land for settlement. In Old Norse, the term *búandi* referred to a permanent dweller, and according to medieval law, every individual was required to belong to a farm. Known as *garðr* or *bær/býr* in Old Norwegian,[51] a farm comprised several buildings, often arranged within an enclosed courtyard (*tun*). Historically, four main courtyard types are recognized: clustered, row, quadrangular, and twin courtyard layouts.[52] Based on the spatial arrangement of the structures at Mosetet, the site may have followed a quadrangular layout—common in Trøndelag and Eastern Norway—with buildings organized around an open central space.

Farms could be large and accommodate several families and their household, or they could be barren holdings run by an *'einvirke'*, a single person and his family.[53] Perhaps Mosetet was a so-called *single-use* farm (no.: *einbølt gård*). It is the *terrain* that determines whether the landscape was steep, hilly, or flat.[54]

During the Middle Ages, fields in Norway were generally small and surrounded by uncultivated land, pastures, or meadows. In Namdalen, Northern Trøndelag County, fields were likely situated on slopes slightly above the bogs. As grain for food had to be grown locally, fields were placed in frost-resistant and micro-climatically favourable areas.[55] Specifically, the slopes between the 'plain' and the 'hill' were utilized for grain cultivation in Namdalen.[56] Arne A. Stamnes notes in his report:[57]

> Such flat plains near large rivers typically consist of fine-grained deposits laid down by rivers. [...] The soil there is classified as belonging to the WRB group Arenosol (WRB: World Reference Base for Soil Resources), characterized by deep, well-drained, sorted sand. [...] According to the landowner of the invest-

[51] Myhre and Øye 2002: 236.

[52] Drange et al. 2011.

[53] Orning 2015.

[54] Drange et al. 2011; Øye 2002.

[55] Vorren 1970: 9.

[56] Groven 1968:144.

[57] Stamnes 2021: 10.

igated field at Brennmoen, there are almost no stones larger than hand-sized rocks visible when plowing the field.

Abundant amounts of barley and oat pollen have been discovered in a small bog approximately 10 meters below Mosetet.[58] Barley *(Hordeum)* is wind-pollinated, requiring the release of large quantities of pollen to ensure successful seed production. In contrast, oats *(Avena sativa)* are self-pollinating and produce less pollen. Additionally, a single flax *(Linum usitatissimum)* pollen grain was found from the initial clearing phase, dating back to around AD 600.[59] The farmers at Mosetet likely cultivated barley and oats in the slopes where there was arable soil.

The main building

At Mosetet, only the main building was excavated. It seems to have been well maintained, with sill logs periodically replaced to prevent decay, a practice known from other Scandinavian timber houses.[60] Floor maintenance was documented (Fig. 3), but no traces of an upper floor were found.[61] The western room is interpreted as the main living room (*stue/stove*), and the eastern as a cookhouse (*eldhus*).

Rural houses were exposed to harsh weather and required regular upkeep.[62] Moss was commonly used for insulation,[63] while peat moss/*Sphagnum* moss also had other practical uses, such as sanitary pads and diapers.[64] The interior was likely windowless or had only narrow, glassless openings, designed to preserve heat and enhance security. The ceiling probably featured two smoke hatches.[65]

The fire and the formation processes

The fire was likely accidental, as the house showed no signs of being cleared beforehand. While some valuable objects may have been removed afterward, the predominance of broken items suggests that useful goods were salvaged post-fire. Small valuables like silver coins and beads remained *in situ*, perhaps overlooked due

[58] Vorren 1970.

[59] Vorren 1970: 7-9.

[60] Olsen 2009.

[61] Croix 2014: 115.

[62] Roesdahl and Scholkmann 2007: 164.

[63] Schia 1991: 185.

[64] Stewart n.d.

[65] Roesdahl and Scholkmann 2007: 163-164.

to their size. The fire likely helped preserve many finds, though some areas may have been accessible for retrieval before the structure was fully consumed. The quantity and distribution of objects left may also reflect whether the fire occurred during the day or at night.

The dirham

A Kufic dirham (Fig. 12), minted c. AD 750–815 and predating the house by 100–300 years, was found during excavation. It may have been placed in the foundation as a pre-Christian style house offering, lost during the house's early use, or kept as a silver clipping for its bullion value.[66] The find indicates that Overhalla had trade connections not only westwards but also eastwards, possibly via Norse routes through Russia in the early Viking Age.[67]

Was Mosetet a deserted farm? Why was it abandoned?

Mosetet farm does not appear in the Land Consolidation Map Archive,[68] meaning it is neither marked nor recorded there. It is also absent from the Taxation Lists.[69] A search in the Place Name Portal[70] confirms the name Mosetet, located at Brennmoen in Overhalla, but it is not listed in *Norwegian Farm Names* under the term *'mo%'*.[71] However, the digital version of *Norwegian Farm Names* records the name *Mousetter* in 1590, in Skage parish, under 'Disappeared Names',[72] though it is uncertain whether this refers to Mosetet. There is also no evidence that Mosetet was registered as part of another nearby farm.

Personally, I suspect that Mosetet Farm was laid to waste and ultimately deserted. The term *deserted farm* (*ødegård*) refers not only to the physical remains but also to the economic and social unit in a broader, more abstract sense.[73] In Norwegian terminology, *abandonment* (*ødeleggelse*) often denotes the cessation of activity on a farm. According to Sandnes, a farm is considered deserted when it has ceased to function as an independent agricultural unit for such an extended period that the

[66] Gullbekk and Sættem 2019: 129.

[67] Møllenhus 1975: 64.

[68] Land Consolidation Map Archive 2024a.

[69] Fladby and Schou 1975.

[70] Place Name Portal 2024b.

[71] Rygh 1903.

[72] Rygh 1903: 318.

[73] Johansen 1979; Sandnes and Salvesen 1978.

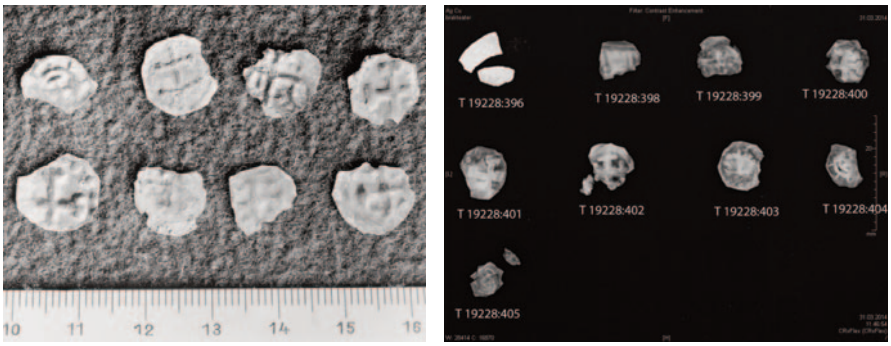


Fig. 12: The Norwegian bracteates (Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU Science Museum CC BY-SA 4.0). On the right, a radiograph of the dirham and bracteates is seen. The dirham is labelled as T19228:396, the Norwegian bracteates is labelled as T19228:398-405 (NTNU Science Museum CC BY-SA 4.0).

abandonment is regarded as more than temporary. He further specifies that a farm is no longer operational as an independent unit if it is either uninhabited or not cultivated by the resident family.[74] Several medieval deserted farms have been located in the course of time.[75]

Julshamn et al. distinguish between different types of abandonment:[76]

> *Total abandonment* means the entire *navnegård* [named farm] was deserted, while *partial abandonment* refers to one or more individual farms being deserted. If the farm is a *demographic deserted farm*, it means it lacked permanent settlement. If it is an *economically deserted farm*, there was no farming or economic activity.

Thus, Mosetet farm fits the category of *total abandonment*.

The main building at Mosetet could have been rebuilt, suggesting that other factors influenced the decision to abandon the site. Before the 1350s, farm abandonment was rare. Possible causes include climate change, such as the onset of the Little Ice Age, ecological challenges, or personal circumstances like taxation and

[74] Sandnes and Salvesen 1978: 31-32.

[75] e.g., Hårstad 2023; 2024; Jonsson (Berglund) 1972; 1973; Kaland 1979; 1986; Mokkelbost n.d.; Pettersen and Wik (Berglund) 1985:283; Randers 1981; 1982; Weber 1986; 2007; Wik (Berglund) 1985.

[76] Julshamn (2002:12).

soil exhaustion. Abandoned farms were often absorbed into neighbouring properties. While the exact reason for Mosetet's abandonment remains unclear, the fire may have played a decisive role alongside economic and environmental pressures.[77]

The resource base of Mosetet farm compared to Vesle Hjerkinn, Høybøen and Lurekalven farms

For comparative purposes, I have examined three medieval abandoned farms: Vesle Hjerkinn, Høybøen, and Lurekalven. Vesle Hjerkinn, located in Dovre Municipality, was excavated by Birthe Weber during two fieldwork campaigns in 1983–86 and 1996.[78] Høybøen (also known as Vindenes), situated in Øygarden Municipality, was investigated by Kjersti Randers,[79] while Sigrid Kaland carried out excavations at Lurekalven (Lygra) in Alver Municipality.[80]

Both Høybøen and Lurekalven were excavated in the 1970´s and were relatively small coastal farms. The building layout at Høybøen reflects the linear or parallel farmstead model, typical of Western Norway during the Iron Age and Middle Ages. In contrast, Lurekalven follows the angled configuration, common across Scandinavia in the same periods.[81] At Vesle Hjerkinn, the dispersed farmstead model is likely the most fitting interpretation (Fig. 13 and 14).[82]

Archaeological excavations have likewise revealed several rural farmsteads dating to the medieval period in Norway, including examples from Southeastern Norway,[83] and comparable sites have been investigated in Denmark.[84] Klemensen links turf-walled houses to the North Atlantic building tradition, as seen in Norse settlements in Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Norway.[85] These structures typically featured a timber core, with thick turf or stone walls providing protection. Roofs were supported by internal posts, and ridge-roof constructions remained common in Ice-

[77] cf Møllenhus 1975.

[78] Riksantikvaren n.d., 79613; Weber 1986; 2007.

[79] Randers 1981; 1982; Riksantikvaren n.d., 64065.

[80] Kaland 1979; 1986; 1987; Riksantikvaren n.d., 6415.

[81] Bertelsen and Urbańczyk 1985; Eriksen 2015: 180-184, with ref.

[82] Bjørdal 2016: 244.

[83] e.g., Finstad 1998; 2009; Hårstad 2023; 2024; Jonsson (Berglund) 1972; 1973; Martens 1972; 2009; 2020.

[84] Klemensen 2001; Svart Kristiansen 1995; 2009; 2014; 2019; Svart Kristiansen and Andersen 2019.

[85] Klemensen 2001: 92-93.

land until around 1500. In narrower buildings (c. 3.5 m), turf walls could even support roof trusses, as exemplified by the tufts at Hovlundan in Brønnøy.[86]

Vesle Hjerkinn, situated at approximately 930 m.a.s.l. in the high mountains, occupies a 420 m² open area within birch forest, traversed by the historic *Kongevegen*. Five structures (Tufts 1–5) have been identified, with Tufts 1 and 3 excavated. The site was in use from the late Viking Age to the High/Late Middle Ages (AD 775–1385). Tuft 1, likely a hall building, was constructed in corner-notched timber and featured three hearths and an earthen bench. Radiocarbon dates suggest construction around the 9th–10th centuries. Tuft 2, located south of Tuft 1, was partially dug into the terrain and also built in timber. A hearth and wall log remains were found, dated to AD 860–990.[87] Tuft 3, interpreted as the foundation of a mountain lodge (fjellstove), measured approximately 6.5 × 13 meters and contained two rooms with hearths and earthen benches; possibly used as sleeping areas. Excavations revealed multiple construction phases and earlier structural remains beneath. Radiocarbon dates range from the Viking Age to the early 13th century.[88] The entrance was likely located in the western gable wall, where the terrain outside is relatively flat and connects to the surrounding buildings. According to Arne Berg, an entrance here would not conflict with the corner hearth.[89] Tuft 4, located at the southeastern edge of the site, measured 5 × 7 meters and featured a central hearth and substantial earthen embankments. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal from the hearth indicates that occupation ceased between AD 1310–1450.[90] Tuft 5, discovered through test trenches and metal detection, lacked visible surface traces and a hearth; its function remains uncertain, possibly an outbuilding or stable.

The refuse layer or midden at Vesle Hjerkinn[91] was located adjacent to the building and measures approximately 15 × 7.5 meters. Finds from both the Viking Age and the Middle Ages were recovered from the deposit, including coins dated to c. AD 1030 and 1095–1150. A radiocarbon date places the deposit within AD 1020–1170. Both the quantity and character of the finds changed over time. The distribution of the material indicates two main phases of use: the earlier phase was primarily based on hunting, trapping, and possible comb production, while the later phase reflects an intensification of activities, with finds connected to household practices and travel

[86] Jonsson (Berglund) 1972; 1973.

[87] Weber 2007: 24.

[88] Weber 2007: 24-39.

[89] Weber 2007: 22.

[90] Weber 2007: 47-48.

[91] Riksantikvaren n.d., 79613-5.

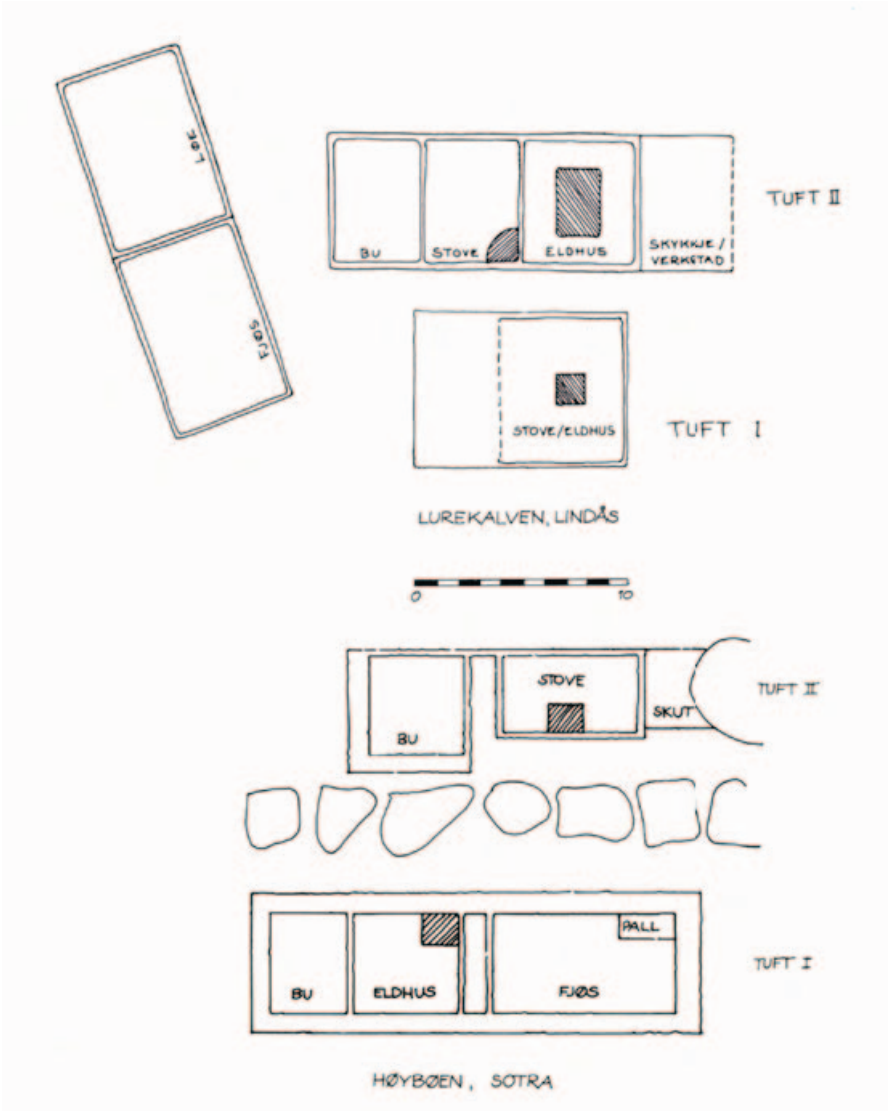


Fig. 13: Simplified ground-plans of the houses from Lurekalven and Høybøen. Based on K. Randers 1981, S. Kaland 1979 (Kaland 1987).

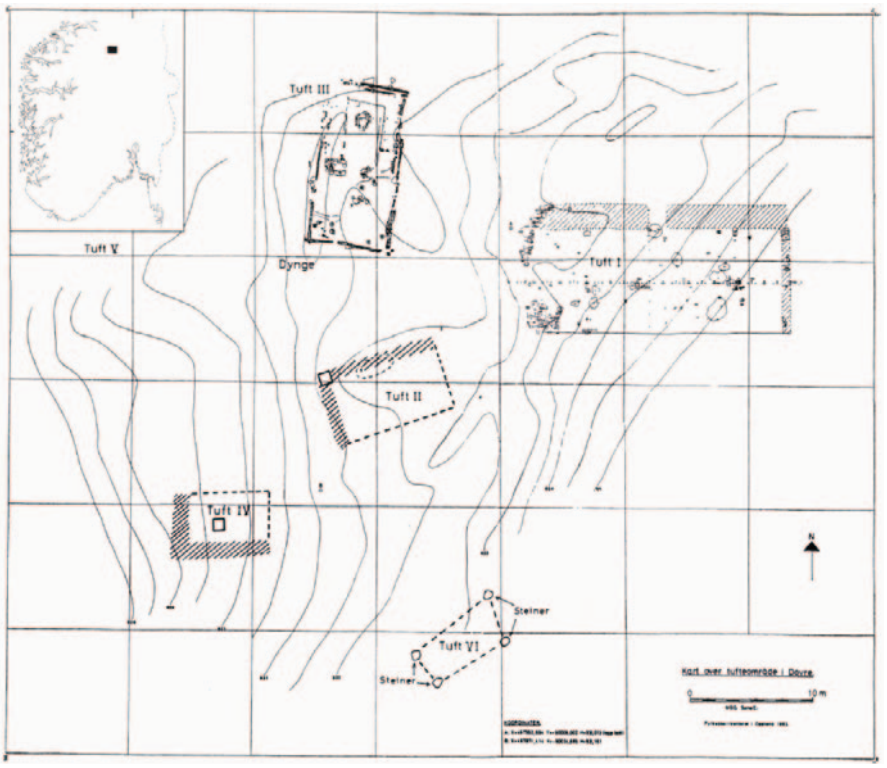


Fig. 14: Map of cultural heritage sites at Vesle Hjerkinn, compiled by Lesja Municipality (Weber 2007:12).

across the Dovrefjell.[92] The artefacts demonstrate extensive use of horses for transport, high meat consumption, local craft production, and long-distance trade or contact.[93]

Høybøen consisted of two connected multi-room buildings: a residential house with pantry, a main room with a hearth in the corner, and annex, and a three-room structure with workshop, hearth room, and byre. Finds indicate cooking, textile production, fishing, and tool use, with looms positioned near hearths in both build-

[92] Weber 2007: 47.

[93] Weber 2007.

ings and over twenty spindle whorls recovered.[94] The artifact assemblage includes, among other things, 200 fragments of pottery, 70 fragments of soapstone vessels, 25 spindle whorls, 80 fishing sinkers/net weights, 40 complete or fragmentary whetstones/grinding slabs, 5 fragments of quernstones, 260 fragments of baking plates—most of them made of slate—200 iron nails/spikes, 100 lumps of iron slag, and 130 strike-a-lights. Key activities were fishing, cattle farming, blacksmithing, and textile work, with limited grain cultivation. Trade with Bergen and nearby districts was reflected in ceramics, soapstone vessels, and whetstones, though the farm was largely self-sufficient.[95]

Lurekalven had three buildings: a two-room dwelling/kitchen, a three-room building with two fireplaces and an external shed, and a barn/hayloft. Textile-related finds and fishing tools came mainly from the residential buildings.[96] Products in high demand, such as meat, butter, wool, hides, and skins, were sold.[97] Cattle farming was likely more profitable and secure than grain cultivation, with grain instead being purchased from Bergen. Imported pottery, decorated bronze, and a runic-inscribed lead piece indicate surplus production and trade links.[98] Fields produced oats and barley, but livestock farming dominated, supported by heathland pastures.

Several notable distinctions can be identified among the four farms. At Høybøen and Lurekalven, the entire farm areas were excavated, while at Mosetet only the main building and midden were examined. At Vesle Hjerkinn, Tufts 1 and 3 have been excavated.[99] Blacksmithing evidence was found at Høybøen, where grain cultivation and small livestock were of lesser importance. The diversified economy at Lurekalven —livestock, grain, and inshore fishing—combined with a location along the Bergen shipping route, gave the farm strategic importance.[100] Both Høybøen and Lurekalven were island farms, requiring boats, and both had a strong focus on fishing.[101] Vesle Hjerkinn functioned as a mountain lodge with a highland economy centered on reindeer hunting. In the early 12th century, it likely gained status as a *sælehus*, offering shelter and food to travelers, an initiative attributed to King Øystein. Excavations of

[94] Øye 2006; Randers 1981.

[95] Randers 1981; 1982; Nesset 2022; Nesset and Hjelle 2022.

[96] Kaland 1986: 31.

[97] Lunden 1976: 243.

[98] Kaland 1986: 85.

[99] Weber 2007.

[100] Kaland 1979; Nesset 2022.

[101] Kaland 1979; 1986; Randers 1981; 1982.

the refuse deposit revealed tools, horse gear, cooking vessel fragments, and food waste, providing insight into medieval dietary practices. Over 70% of the faunal remains were from reindeer, reflecting local hunting strategies. Fish remains included both freshwater species from the nearby Folla River and marine species such as cod and herring. The cod bones may represent dried fish, a lightweight and nutritious food well suited for long-distance travel. The presence of such remains may reflect the movement of goods and provisions along the *Kongevegen*, possibly associated with pilgrim traffic across the mountain. Fasting days required fish, which was difficult to obtain en route.[102]

Similarities include the presence of partially timber-framed buildings at Mosetet, Vesle Hjerkinn, Høybøen, and Lurekalven. Evidence of oat and barley cultivation is found at both Lurekalven and Mosetet, while pollen analysis from Refuse Heap I at Vesle Hjerkinn suggests local use of barley and possibly imported rye. Like Mosetet, Høybøen and Lurekalven maintained strong trade links with Bergen and nearby districts.[103] Vesle Hjerkinn likely was a pit stop for royalty and pilgrims on their way to Nidaros.[104] For Mosetet, trading partners are uncertain, but farmers may have traveled to local markets or trading settlements, possibly using riverboats along the River Namsen.

The artefacts from Mosetet reflect typical inland farm activities of the period (Table 3). Grain could be cultivated in the area, suggesting an agricultural economy that likely included both arable farming and animal husbandry. Unburned animal bones, probably sheep's teeth, were found in the midden, suggesting sheep that provided wool, milk, meat, and manure for soil fertility. Unfortunately, osteological analyses were not conducted, limiting our understanding of the composition of the livestock. Fertilizer may have come from the midden or an external sheep barn.

Textile production was likely a significant part of the economy at Mosetet. Twenty unfinished spindle whorls indicate local manufacture, and weaving was carried out in the main living room, as was typical in the Middle Ages when textile work was a female responsibility.[105] The placement of the loom in the main living room suggests that weaving was an integral aspect of household activities. However, its exact position at Mosetet appears to have varied based on the room's layout and practical considerations. A corner opposite the entrance would have provided a warmer, more protected space, shielded from drafts, dirt, and foot traffic. Given the

[102] Vedeler 2020; Weber 2007.

[103] Kaland 1979; 1986; 1987; Randers 1981; 1982.

[104] Weber 2007.

[105] e.g., Øye 2022: 7.

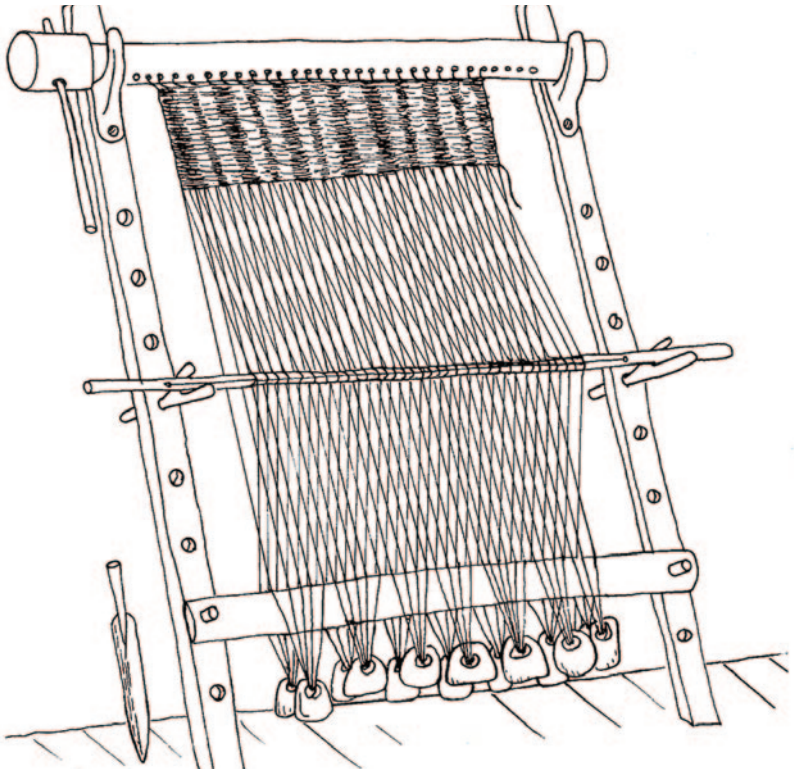


Fig. 15: Warp-weighted loom. Illustration: Silje E. Fretheim 2010.

loom's considerable size, it would have been advantageous to reserve the area near the hearth for other activities. From a social perspective, it is unlikely that this corner placement was intended to isolate women involved in textile production. Instead, the presence of the loom in the main room highlights how weaving was seamlessly integrated into daily life and reflects the close connection between the weavers and the household's daily rhythm (Fig. 15).

According to Øye the archaeological remains at the two relatively small farmsteads of Høybøen and Lurekalven indicate family-based activities, where indoor finds

largely point to women's work, such as textile production and food preparation.[106] Furthermore, Øye states:[107]

> These farms appear to have been inhabited by one, possibly two households at the same time. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the transmission of work skills primarily took place within the household. The numerous spindle whorls and other equipment for textile production suggest that textile work played a significant role on these farms – all of which were located in areas with good grazing conditions for sheep, ensuring a steady supply of wool. Both at Høybøen and Lurekalven, the heathland areas have been estimated to support a flock of approximately 30 sheep on each farm.[108]

Textile production was also a key economic activity at Mosetet. Øye's statement demonstrates that women in the Middle Ages were just as important in working life as men.[109] The difference lies in the division of labor: while men primarily worked outdoors with agricultural tasks, women worked indoors with food preparation and textile production.[110]

Concluding remarks

Through the combined analysis of architectural remains, artefact assemblages, and formation processes, the study of Mosetet offers a nuanced reconstruction of household life in rural medieval Norway. The findings demonstrate how a self-sufficient farming unit, grounded in traditional building techniques and subsistence strategies, nevertheless participated in wider networks of trade and cultural exchange, as evidenced by the presence of imported artefacts. This interplay between local continuity and external influence challenges any notion of Mosetet as a peripheral outpost. Instead, it should be understood as an active and integrated element within the broader medieval agrarian system—one in which knowledge, resources, and social strategies were managed with purposeful adaptability across the household's occupational history.

[106] Øye 2006: 445.

[107] Øye 2006: 445.

[108] Randers 1981: 102; Kaland 1986: 36.

[109] Øye 2006.

[110] Cf Bertelsen 2019:63; Øye 2006.

Mosetet was not an isolated remnant on the fringe of medieval Norway, but a purposeful, well-connected farmstead—rooted in tradition, open to innovation, and fully embedded in the rhythms and networks of the wider agrarian world.

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Abbreviations
T = Accession number, NTNU University Museum, Trondheim, Norway

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