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Settlement names of two millenniums.  
The dating of the *land*-names and the  
semantics of the ending *-land*

The farm names with *land* n. as the main element form an important class of Nordic settlement names. Most names of this type are found in Norway, approximately 2000 names, where the key area is the southwestern part of the country, i.e. Agder, Rogaland, Hordaland and Telemark. Sweden has more than 300 *land*- and *landa*-names. There are also quite a few *land*-names in areas of Norse settlement, especially in Iceland, Shetland and the Orkneys, cf. fig. 1.

In the thesis *Namn og gard. Studium av busetnadsnamn på -land* (Særheim 2001), I am giving a review of the Nordic settlement names of this class, i.e. of the distribution of the names and the way of naming. I have examined more thoroughly the names ending in *-land* from an area in Rogaland and Vest-Agder, concerning the interpretation of the names, the semantic meaning of the name element *land* and the dating of the names. From this area also other names ending in *-land* are presented. Quite a few of them seem to be old settlement names of the same type and age as the names of the land register (cadastre).

In this article a summary will be given of the results of the study, including a presentation of the conclusions concerning the two major questions: the semantics of the name element *land* and the dating of the settlement names in *-land*.

*Nordic place names ending in -land*

The name element *-land* is used in different ways in Nordic place names, according to the various semantics of the



Fig. 1. The distribution of Nordic settlement names ending in *-land*.

appellative *land* n. The meaning 'area, district' is found in ancient district names, like the Norwegian *Hålogaland*, *Hordaland*, *Rogaland*, *Grenland*, *Hadeland*, the Swedish *Uppland*, *Värmland*, *Södermanland*, *Ångermanland*, *Västergötland*, *Östergötland*, and the Danish *Jylland*. There are also younger area names with this element, like *Haugalandet* (the district surrounding Haugesund) and *Strandalandet* (the area that belongs to the municipality of Strand).

This word is also the final element in some ancient names of islands, like *Gotland*, *Lolland*, *Åland*, and in younger names of islands, like *Gomalandet* and *Hareidlandet*. In younger names of islands and of sea-, lake- or riversides, like *Ognalandet* and *Eidelandet*, the word is used in the meaning 'land as opposed to sea; river-, lake- or seaside'.

The name element *-land(et)* is also found in field names, in old and young names, meaning 'field' and 'cultivated field', like *Harpelandet* (from the growing of flax) and *Hampelandet* (the growing of hemp). Some of the field names ending in *-land* are old settlement names, originating from deserted farms.

Habitation names ending in *-land* are used of groups of farms, of single farms, of cotter's farms and of summer farms (in the mountains). More than 900 of the 2000 Norwegian *land*-names are found in Vest-Agder and Rogaland, cf. fig. 2. Most of the Swedish *landa*-names – reflecting genitive plural – are found in the southwestern part of the country (Bohuslän, Västergötland, Dalsland and Värmland). The ending *-land* is most common in Västernorrland, which is the key area of this type of names in northern Sweden.

According to Marwick (1952, p. 231) at least 35 of the 54 farm names in the Orkneys ending in *-land* are of Norse origin. In Shetland there are approximately 76 names of this type, according to Stewart (1987, p.192). Many of the *land*-names in areas of Norse settlement are identical with Norwegian names, e.g. *Holland* in the Orkneys (12 places, 2 of the names are probably younger), *Houlland* in Shetland (18 places, 2 of the names are younger), and *Holland* in Caithness, reflecting ON \**Há(va)land*, with ON *hár/hór* adj. 'high' as the first

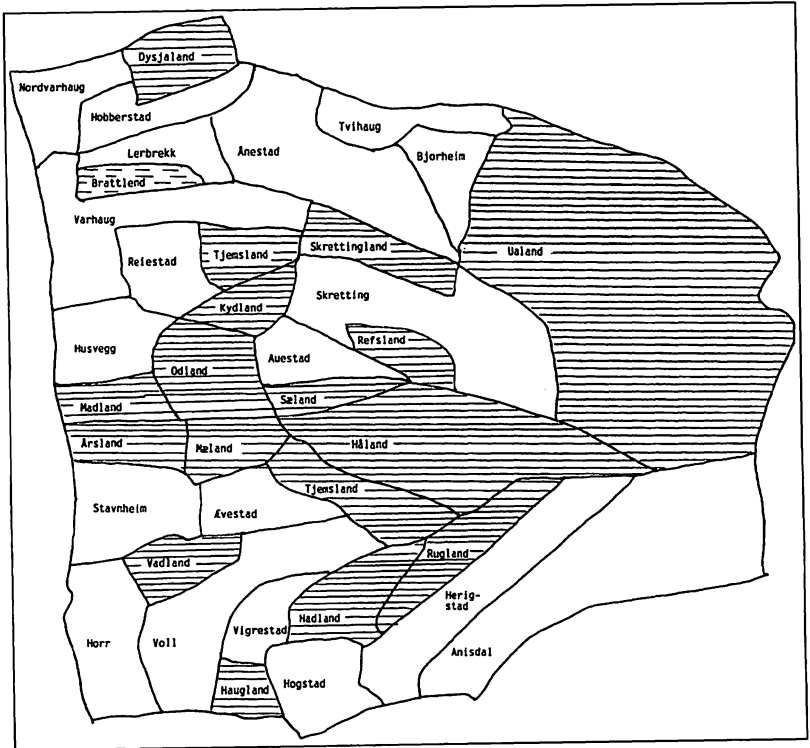


Fig. 2. Settlement names ending in *-land* in Varhaug (Rogaland).

element. The similar Norwegian name *Håland/Holand* is found 67 places, e.g. 24 places in Rogaland.

Other names of this type in areas of Norse settlement with close parallels in Norway are *Hamarsland* (Shetland, 3 times, cf. the Norwegian *Hamarsland*), *Litlaland* (Shetland, Norwegian *Litlaland* a.o.), *Mai(l)land* a.o. (Shetland, 6 times, Norwegian *Meland* and *Mæland*), *Vatsland* (Shetland, Norwegian *Vatland*), *Stanesland* (Shetland, Norwegian *Steinsland*), *Heyland* (Orkneys, Norwegian *Høyland*), *Bigland* (Orkneys, Norwegian *Byggland*), *Russland* (Orkneys, Norwegian *Rossaland* a.o.), *Leyland* (Orkneys) and *Litherland* (Northwest-England; similar to the Norwegian *Liland*), *Stockaland* (Isle of Man, Norwegian *Stokkaland*). Many more examples of parallel names could have been mentioned.

### *The semantics of the name element -land*

For the original semantics of the name element *land* in ancient settlement names, some Swedish onomasts, like Lindroth (1946, p. 25) and Lundahl (1972, p. 22), have suggested 'river- or lakeside', in other words 'land as opposed to water (sea)', describing a field by a river or a lake. They emphasize that this semantics suit the situation of many *land-* and *landa-* farms by a river or a lake, and that many names seem to have a river name or a lake name as the first element.

Other Swedish onomasts, e.g. Sahlgren (1942, pp. 3), Ståhl (1970, pp. 81) and Karlsson (1968, p. 24), have preferred a content in close connection with farming, like 'piece of land, land as property', or the more specialized 'cultivated field'. The agrarian semantics have been preferred by Norwegian onomasts (cf. Olsen 1926, p. 123, Stemshaug 1985, p. 64, NSL, p. 280).

By studying the farms with a name ending in *-land* one easily gets the impression that these often are secondary farms, in a peripheral situation, seen from a mother-farm. Especially in central farming districts the *land-*farms are

often secondary farms, situated between the older farms. Some *land*-names contain the name of an older neighbouring farm as the first element, like *Bjárland* (ON \**Bjárland*) by *Bø*, *Valland* (ON \**Vallarland*) by *Voll*, and *Skrettingland* by *Skretting*, which indicates that the farm land earlier belonged to the older farm.

Deserted farms with names ending in *-land* give the same impression. These farms are often situated between older and more central farms, often in the outskirts of the parishes, lying on less fertile ground. It was not without reason that the settlement on these farms was abandoned during a period of crises and changes, in some districts as early as 550 A.D.

It is a common view among onomasts that many settlement names in *-land* are original field names, in other words names used of the fields (meadows, pastures a.s.o.) of an older farm. Some of these field names in *-land* have later become settlement names, as the result of the clearing of farms and thus establishing permanent habitation in these places. An original semantics 'fields that are suitable for farming' (i.e. 'hay-fields, meadows, cultivated fields', and possibly 'pastures') therefore seem to suit well, while the content 'fields by a river, a lake or the sea' is less probable.

Also by studying the first elements of Nordic settlement names in *-land*, one gets the impression that the original semantics of *land* is closely connected with the agrarian function of the places. In his book on Norwegian settlement names, *Farms and Fanes of Ancient Norway*, Olsen emphasizes that the names "speak very plainly of the kind of operation carried out on the *land*" (1928, p.143).

Very common are words for different species of trees and plants, covering about 20 % of the Norwegian and Swedish names, cf. *Eikeland* (63 times, ON *eiki* n.), *Birkeland* (46 times, ON *birki* n.), *Espeland* (28 times, ON *espi* n.), *Hetland* (17 times, ON *hesli* n.), *Alme-*, *Åm-*, *Omland* a.o. (20 times, ON *almr* m.), *Einstabland* (ON *einstapi* m.).

Some first elements are words for meadows, hay-lands and the storing of hay, cf. *Fidjeland* (ON *fit* f.), *Høyland* (ON *hey* n.), *Tjelmeland* (ON *hjalmr* m.) and *Løland* (ON *hlaða* f.). Other words describe pastures and the keeping of livestock:

## INGE SÆRHEIM

*Feland* (ON *fé* n.), *Kalva-* and *Kåveland* (ON *kalfr* m.), *Rossa-* and *Rosseland* (ON *hross* n.), *Svinland* (ON *svín* n.).

Some names originate from the growing of crops, like *Akland* (ON *akr* m.), *Byg(g)land* (ON *bygg* n.), *Harvaland* (ON *hafri* m.), *Rugland* (ON *rugr* m.). Other names contain words for different traditions and working methods in older agriculture, like *Kvernaland* (ON *kvern* f.) and *Brenneland* (probably ON *brenna* f.).

First elements of this type are mainly found in the *land*-names from the southern part of Norway. Appellatives describing the topography are more common in the names from the northern part of the country, including Trøndelag.

Also in the Swedish *land*- and *landa*-names the first elements containing words for trees, plants and farming are typical for the southern part of the country, while topographical appellatives are dominating in the material from northern Sweden.

First elements describing the vegetation, the hay-lands and the keeping of livestock are also found in the names of this class in Shetland and the Orkneys, cf. *Bigland* (Rousay, Orkneys, probably ON *bygg* n.), *Heyland* (Sandwick, Orkneys, ON *hey* n. or Scottish *hey/hay*), *Tarland* (South Ronaldsay, Orkneys, probably ON *tari* m.), *Noltland* (Sanday, Westray and Deerness, Orkneys, ON *naut* n.), *Russland* (Westray, Orkneys, ON *hross* n.).

More common in the names from areas of Norse settlement, however, are topographical appellatives, cf. *Ireland* (Stenness, Orkneys and Sandwick, Shetland; ON *eyrr* f.), *Backaland* (Eday, Orkneys, ON *bakki* m.), and adjectives: *Litlaland* (Fetlar, Shetland, ON *lítill*), *Swartland* (Sandwick and Graemsay, Orkneys, ON *svartr*) and the mentioned *Holland* (Orkneys) and *Houland* (Shetland; ON *hár*). In some of the names it is difficult to decide whether the first element is of Norse or Scottish origin.

Some of the Norwegian settlement names in *-land* seem to contain a compound appellative or a compositum with an appellative character, cf. *Augland*, *Økland* (ON *Aukland*), *Roland* (Fåberg, *Rudland* 1330), *Rudland* (ON *Ruðland*), *Øresland* (Høvåg, *Øyresland* 1416), *Ørsland* (ON

\**Øyrisland*), *Laupland* (ON \**Laup(s)land*), *Kylland* and *Kydland* (ON \**Kýrland*). The two first mentioned, ON *Aukland* and *Ruðland*, probably originate from the cultivation of the land, with the semantics 'additional land' and 'cleared land', the other ones, ON \**Øyrisland*, \**Laup(s)land* and \**Kýrland*, from the value of the land (farm).

Close connection with, and probably dependence on, an older and more central farm is sometimes expressed by using the name of the older farm as the first element in the *land*-name, cf. the above mentioned *Bjárland*, *Valland* and *Skrettingland*.

A comparison with other classes of ancient settlement names in the examined area (i.e. parts of Rogaland and Vest-Agder) shows that the first elements more often have agrarian character in the *land*-names than in the names ending in *-heim*, *-vin* and *-stad*.

Also some adjectives used as the first element and appellatives that give information about the soil, probably signify that the names have originated as field designations, i.e. names of farm land.

In approximately 60 Norwegian settlement names with the first element *Land-*, this element also seems mostly to have close connection with agriculture, with the semantics 'field, soil, cultivated field'. Some compositions are likely to have appellative character, e.g. ON *Landsefni* 'fit for land (field)' (*Landsem* a.o.), \**Landroð* 'cleared land, cultivated land' (*Landro*, *Landrø*, *Landråk* a.o.), and probably *Landsverk*, meaning 'cultivated land'.

In this context it is interesting to notice that Gelling in most of the ancient settlement names in *-land* in England has suggested an original semantics "new arable area" (1984, pp. 245). These names reflect "new settlements of the Anglo-Saxon period in areas colonized or reclaimed in response to an increasing need for arable". Many names of this type are found in northern England, where the Scandinavian settlement and influence was strong. In some cases it is difficult to decide whether the name is of English or Scandinavian origin, and Gelling concludes (p. 245): "It is reasonable to regard the ON



word *land* as subsumed in the use of the OE term".

The appellative *land* appears in all Germanic languages, in old and younger variants of the languages, with fairly similar semantics in the different languages. There are closely related words in other North-European languages, i.e. in Celtic, Baltic and Slavic. The Swedish *linda* f. 'fallow land' is an ablaut form to *land*, as is probably the common Nordic *lund* m. 'grove'.

A study of the use of the appellative *land* in Germanic languages and of closely related words, gives evidence of an original semantic content 'open terrain, open field, uncultivated land, heath'. In Old Germanic a meaning in connection with the agricultural use of the land or field has possibly been developed, i.e. 'land that can be used as hay field (meadow) or cultivated field', possibly 'pasture'. In this period there have probably been made field and settlement names ending in *-land* with this semantics. Younger names may be made to semantics later developed, like 'soil' and 'cultivated field'.

The content 'land (fields) by a river, by a lake or by the sea', which is found in younger farm and field names ending in the definite form *-landet*, still being productive in the naming process, is less probable in ancient field and settlement names with this word as the main element.

### *The dating of the land-names. Some linguistic criteria*

On a purely linguistic basis it seems difficult to find certain criteria of the age of the Nordic settlement names ending in *-land*. Uncompound names in plural, ON *Landir*, seem to have a special position, since farms with these names are often situated close by and probably have been connected with a center in the district (cf. Steinnes 1951).

However, this is probably not due to the linguistic form of the name. Uncompound names are not necessarily older than compound names, even though they often seem to be that. Also a plural form does not in itself seem to be older than a singular

form, even though ON *Landir*-names, like uncompound forms of other types of settlement names, as a group seem to be older than compound names of the same class.

By comparing the way of composing the elements in different types of ancient settlement names in the examined area, it appears that so-called stem-composition is more common in *heim*- and *vin*-names than in *land*- and *stad*-names, cf. the *heim*-names *Grødheim* and *Bærheim* with stem-composition, ON *Grjótheimr* and *\*Bergheimr*, and the *land*-names *Grødaland* and *Bergaland* with genitive-composition, ON *\*Grjótaland* and *\*Bergaland*.

This difference might be due to the age of the names, and the type of composition might possibly be regarded as an argument for a relative chronology between the classes of names. However, a larger corpus of names must be examined in order to draw more certain conclusions on this criterion. An important argument against extensive use of this criterion is the fact that both types of composition are very old (cf. Christensen & Kousgård Sørensen 1972, pp. 180).

The various types of first elements have sometimes been used as a base of dating the different classes of settlement names. The many neutral collective-derived appellatives of tree species, used as the first element in Norwegian *land*-names, could maybe indicate that these names were made in the period 200 – 500 A.D., when derivatives of this type were made. This dating would also be in accordance with other criteria of name dating.

On the other hand it is evident that appellatives of this type have been used in the Nordic languages after the year 500 A.D. Many younger field names with very local character from the examined area contain name elements of this type, cf. *Eigebrekka*, *Espelfjellet* and *Espemyra* from the farm Åse in Eigersund. Settlement names like *Birkeland*, *Eigeland*, *Espeland*, *Eskeland*, *Hetland* a.o. might therefore from a purely linguistic point of view very well be younger than 500 A.D.

The fact that Norwegian *land*-names do not contain first elements that reflect Christian culture, is regarded as an evidence that these names as a rule are made before the year

(900 –) 1000 A.D.

Traditionally it has been reckoned that there are far more words for pagan cult in the *land*-names than in the *heim*-, *vin*- and *stad*-names, in the total number of names as well as per cent, cf. *Frøyland* (ON *Freyja*, 14 times), *Frøytland* (ON *Freyr*, 6 times), *Nærland* (ON *Njǫrðr*, 4 times), *Totland* (*af Þorslande* about 1175, ON *Þórr*, 10 times), *Osland* (*a Odenslande* 1322, ON *Óðinn*, twice), *Hovland* (ON *hof* n., about 40 times), *Helgaland* (ON *heilagr* adj., about 40 times).

However, it is not obvious that the reason for this is a difference in age between these classes of names. Maybe this is due to the different types of names, to the use of the names and the function of the places. The fact that several interpretations of the first element as a word for pagan cult are controversial, is an important reason not to base the dating on this criterion.

Most *land*-names seem to contain linguistic elements that are known in Nordic languages, and many names of this group are fairly easy to interpret. This fact could maybe lead to the conclusion that these names are relatively young. It is not obvious, however, that names like *Håland* and *Høyland*, which from a linguistic point of view could very well be made in Mediaeval times, and which are identical with names in areas of Norse settlement, are in fact young compositions just because they are linguistically transparent. From a linguistic point of view, these names might have been made in the early Iron Age. In some districts farms with these two names are central habitations with a long continuous settlement.

A few *land*-names seem to contain personal names that are borrowed from German in historical times, e.g. *Hindersland* (ON *Heinrekr*), *Hobbåsland* and *Håbbesland* (ON *Hagbarðr*). However, these examples are few and the whole group of names cannot be dated on this base. Still this signifies (if the interpretations are correct) that there have been made *land*-names in historical times.

Several of the *land*-names contain personal names (about 4% of the Norwegian material), which is different from the *heim*- and the *vin*-names. However, this difference might be due to the type of farms, not necessarily to the age of the

names.

Some of the appellatives used as the first element seem to reflect historical events that can be regarded as more recent phenomena, not older than the Viking age, e.g. *kvern* f. (*Kvernaland*), that describes water mills, a tradition which was probably introduced by Christian monks.

In addition, it can be mentioned that some words for persons seem to have connection with people from lower social groups, like ON *þræll* m., and possibly ON *skinnari* m. and *smíðr* m. Some words for rocky and muddy soil probably reflect difficult working conditions while clearing the fields and establishing the farms. This kind of information in the names probably says something about the type and the status of the farms, but this is difficult – or rather impossible – to use as a base of dating.

The fact that there are many *land*-names in areas of Norse settlement (especially in Shetland and the Orkneys) that are identical with Norwegian settlement names of this type, clearly signifies that this class of names was productive when people from Norway settled on these islands. Recent research indicates that the contact with the western islands – and probably the Norse settlement there – is older than earlier believed. There have been connections, at least, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, maybe as early as in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Lillehammer 1994, pp. 223).

### *Some historical criteria*

Even though the dating of settlement names by using historical criteria is very complicated methodically, this type of criteria is useful as a supplement to the linguistic base. It is, however, very important to be aware of what the different criteria actually say something about, and avoid circular conclusions. Historical criteria, like the archaeological finds, the Mediaeval tax, the situation of the farms a.s.o., primarily say something about the settlement, not about the name. An important premise for the dating of

## INGE SÆRHEIM

settlement names on historical criteria is the fact that the names date from the same time as the settlement. Other premises are continuity in the use of the name, and accordance with the dating on linguistic base (cf. Sandnes 1967, 1973).

The land rent valuation of the farms in Mediaeval times gives information about the size – and probably the age – of the farms with the various names, and of the relationship between the types of settlement names. Farms with *land*-names from the examined area that appear in the cadastres, have on average had a lower land rent valuation in Mediaeval times than farms with names ending in *-vin*, *-heim* and *-stad*.

In Jæren, where the tax was figured in grain (corn), the average tax was 3,05 pund for the 18 *heim*-farms, 2,51 pund for the 12 *vin*-farms, 1,89 pund for the 41 *stad*-names and 1,40 pund for the 113 *land*-names. In Dalane, where the tax was figured in butter, the average tax was 2,04 laupar for the 26 *stad*-farms, 1,69 for the 7 *heim*-farms and 1,36 for the 98 *land*-farms. In the examined area the average tax was 3,07 for *-heim*, 2,41 for *-vin*, 2,03 for *-stad* and 1,46 for *-land*. There are, however, great variations within the *land*-group. Many farms are small and registered with low tax figures, while some big and central farms have high figures.

By studying the Mediaeval tax records of some areas in Norway, Sandnes (1973) has calculated the percentage of the different types of names that form part of the 10 % of the biggest farms. In Jæren 18,2 % of the *heim*-farms belongs to this group, 6,3 % of the *stad*-farms and 2 % of the *land*-farms, but – surprisingly – none of the *vin*-farms. In Dalane the figures are 23,1 % of the *stad*-farms, 14,3 % of the *heim*-farms and 11,2 % of the *land*-farms. In southern Rogaland the *heim*- and *stad*-farms are, in other words, on average better represented among the largest – and probably the oldest – farms than the *land*-farms. In number, however, the *land*-farms are better represented than the two other groups: 13 *land*-farms, 9 *stad*-farms and 5 *heim*-farms.

During the agricultural crisis that followed the Black Death, more farms with *land*-names in the examined area – in total number as well as per cent – were deserted than farms

with *heim-*, *vin-* and *stad-*names. In southern Rogaland 57 % of the *land-*farms were deserted, 45 % of the *vin-*farms, 36 % of the *stad-*farms and 33 % of the *heim-*farms.

The fact that the desertation of the farms in times of crisis has been more typical for *land-*farms than for *heim-*, *vin-* and *stad-*farms, seems to be due to the more peripheral situation of the *land-*farms, and the poor soil. Also, a study of the situation of the farms with *land-*names registered in the cadastres, gives this impression.

The collection of 'other' names ending in *-land* in the examined area has revealed quite a few defunct settlement names of this type. In several cases the names are connected with farms that were deserted around 550 A.D. These names are in general regarded by archaeologists and historians as the original settlement names.

Some of these 'other' names in *-land* are found as the first element in another place name, like \**Eigeland* in *Eigelandsskogan* (from Birkeland in Sokndal) and \**Berkland* in *Berklandshagane* and *Berklandskleiva* (from Njå in Time). Most of the names have parallels in the examined area or other places in Norway, cf. *Biland* (from Øvre Hetland in Eigersund) and *Hinnarland* (Fuglestad in Hå), cf. fig. 3. However some of them are not found other places, such as \**Heisland* (Søra Sunde in Stavanger), *Hynnland* (Åmdal in Eigersund) and *Tansland* (Skåra in Eigersund).

In Jæren there are archaeological finds from the Bronze Age and the earliest Iron age (1500 B.C. to 300 A.D.) on 19 of the *land-*farms, i.e. on 22 % of the material. An archaeological find does not, of course, date the farm name. On the other hand there seems to be a certain correlation between the finds and the type of farm name represented (cf. Myhre 1984). In comparison there are finds from this period on 4 of the *vin-*farms (33 %), on 11 of the *stad-*farms (31 %) and on 3 of the *heim-*farms (17 %).

The archaeological material on historic farms with *land-*names and on deserted farms with names of this type in the examined area, seems to indicate that many *land-*farms were cleared in the important expansion period within agriculture which is dated around 200–550 A.D. In the same period farms

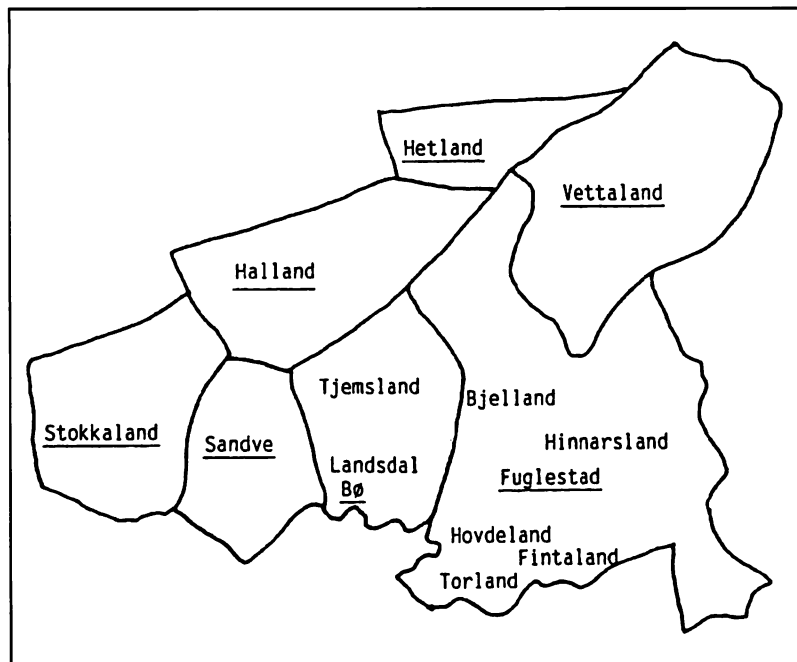


Fig. 3. Settlement names ending in *-land* in the Bø-/Fuglestad-area (Onga, Rogaland).

with names ending in *-heim*, *-vin* and *-stad* were cleared. Also the names of these farms were probably made in this period, passed on in the oral tradition up to present time (and in literature the last 500–800 years). However, many settlement names ending in *-land* must be younger. A large group of them was probably made in the expansion period that began in the last part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Settlement names ending in *-land* made after (900–) 1000 A.D. are exceptions.

A few *land*-names are probably older than the year 200 A.D. There are archaeological finds from earlier periods, e.g. from the Bronze Age, that signify continuous agriculture on several places where a *land*-name is used today. This early dating is likely for some of the uncompound ON *Landir*-names.

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## INGE SÆRHEIM

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