

Georg Haggrén & Henrik Jansson

New light on the colonisation of Nyland/Uusimaa

Western Nyland/Uusimaa during the late Iron Age and Medieval Period.

Settlement history from the viewpoint of archaeology, history, biology and geology

(Project 2003-2005)

Especially the late Iron Age but even the medieval period is a poorly known period in the history of the coast and archipelago of southern Finland. The archival sources are scarce and the hitherto known archaeological finds are, if possible, even rarer. Through combining historical and archaeological research we can get more information about Nyland/Uusimaa during this period. Besides the traditional humanistic sciences there are other disciplines, which have proven to be very useful in researching prehistoric and early historic periods. In our project several disciplines are also combined. These include archaeology and history, as well as environmental sciences such as geology and palynology.¹ The primary aims are to investigate the development of the environment and the human activities, resource utilization and settlement history of the area with an emphasis on maritime adaptations and the utilization of the archipelagic resources. This includes e.g. occupation, harbour, navigation, subsistence and ritual activities.

The traditional view

According to the traditional archaeological view the future province of Nyland ('New Land') had been sparsely populated during the Iron Age and during the 10th century the population disappeared totally. According to the traditional historical view, the coastal zone was not populated until the 12th and 13th centuries, when the Swedes colonised new areas to the east of the Baltic Sea.² The subsistence strategies of these Iron Age populations would have been based on agriculture and little weight has been given to the maritime aspect of this population, in other words how they utilized the direct coastal and archipelagic zones. For the archaeologists one problem has been the lack of fieldwork in these areas of Nyland, and possibly because of this no settlement or harbour from the prehistoric and early medieval period was known in the coastal area before the 1990's.

The integration of Nyland/Uusimaa into a part of the Swedish realm

The province of Nyland/Uusimaa

In historical documents Nyland/Uusimaa was first mentioned as late as 1310. During that time the provinces of Sweden were divided between king Birger and his two brothers. According to an agreement made between them Nyland was one of the areas controlled by the king's younger brother count Valdemar.³ However, by the late 1320s at the latest, the government of the province of Nyland was already arranged. The province had a bailiff (Lat. *advocatus*), a judge (Lat. *legifer*) and an ecclesiastic tax collector under the bishop of Åbo/Turku as well as a seal of its own. Soon afterwards the province of western Nyland was divided into eight parishes (from west to east: Tenala/Tenhola, Pojo/Pohja, Karis/Karjaa, Ingå/Inkoo, Lojo/Lohja, Sjundeå/Siuntio, Kyrklätt/Kirkkonummi, Esbo/Espoo), which together formed the county of Raseborg/Raasepori, named after the castle with the same name. The eastern part of the province was from now on called the county of Borgå/Porvoo.⁴ (Fig. 1)

New archaeological evidence

The main types of hitherto known prehistoric sites in this coastal area are burial cairns that in the maritime landscape are not only dated to the Bronze Age, but also to the late Iron Age. As a result of our project we have managed to show that most of these cairns are located along possible ancient waterways. Palynological analyses from Orslandet indicate that an agricultural continuity has its beginning already in the 6th-7th century AD, which is 500-700 years earlier than the scholars has previously thought. This prehistoric and early medieval land use was very intensive and not merely occasional slash and burn cultivation. However we don't know where the settlement sites were situated during the late Iron Age.⁵ This is one of the primary problems, which our archaeological work will be concentrated on during the near future.

Sparse finds

Until recent years not many medieval finds have been found in the former county of Raseborg. Most of the older finds are from parish churches and the castles of Raseborg and Junkarsborg.⁶ Even according to the most recent excavations the medieval settlement sites have proven to be very small in area and

the finds are also sparse. Not much is left from the wooden houses or the domestic utensils people used, and very little, if any; datable finds are found from these sites. Even the cultural layers in the soil of these sites are very thin. Most utensils must have been made from organic materials and after being left on the ground they have totally disappeared. The scarce find material is dominated by pieces of imported items. The same phenomenon has also been recognised by Swedish archaeologists: it is very difficult to identify medieval rural settlement in central Sweden.⁷

Important sites

The Kullåkersbacken site in northern Snappertuna, excavated already in 1926, was included in this project for further research, and showed to have an interesting find-material. The material from the settlement at the seashore included both Iron Age type and Slavic earthenware as well as 14th century stoneware pottery from two or three houses. On this site we have the first indication of an occupation that continues over the formerly deserted period between the 10th and 13th centuries.⁸ The site is still unique in the area, but the palynological, and other evidence, show that in the future similar sites can be expected. Several palynological samples have been taken from different parts of Nyland but they are still being processed.

The archaeological work at Orslandet in the archipelago of Ingå is still in its early phases but in Hangö/Hanko two field seasons of excavations have been conducted. The find material shows that Hangö was permanently settled at the latest during the middle of the 13th century. Some Iron Age pottery has also been found from the site but no proper evidence of permanent prehistoric settlement has been revealed yet. The excavations in the summer of 2004 resulted in a surprisingly well-preserved 13th and 14th century settlement and an abundance of pottery. Most of the pottery was so-called proto-stoneware and stoneware but also Slavic pottery and a silver coin from between 1320 and 1340 AD were excavated.⁹

Another important site is Köklax/Kauklahti in Esbo/Espoo, which was excavated in 2002 and 2003 by the National Board of Antiquities. According to both the evidence of the pottery and the radiocarbon dating of charred cereal grains, this site in the estuary of the River Esbo/Espoo has been colonised during the 13th century. Remains of several medieval buildings were documented. The finds consisted mostly of ceramics most of which were German stoneware but there were proto-stoneware and eastern

Slavic pottery as well. In the middle of this site a graveyard dating most probably to the early or high Middle Ages was also found.¹⁰

Test-excavations and smaller excavations have been conducted and are being planned on several sites (e.g. Busö in the archipelago of Ekenäs/Tammisaari) in the project area. Furthermore many deserted village-sites have been found that have yet to be researched. On the site of one large village abandoned in the 1550's, Mankby in Esbo, many of the structures, e.g. the remains of over 15 houses and several deserted roads are still visible. (Fig. 2)

Evidence of trade

Even if finds from many of the sites are scarce, many interesting ceramics have been found from certain coastal settlement-sites. These finds of medieval ceramics are remarkably diversified. Late medieval German stoneware has been found from several sites, but there are older ceramics as well. Hangö, Kullåkersbacken and Köklaks have revealed several pieces of German proto-stoneware and early stoneware from the late 13th and 14th centuries. Furthermore, from the same sites and even from some others, also pieces of so called Slavonic or Baltic earthenware have been found. Some of these ceramics are originally from North-western Russia or the Novgorod region and some might be of Estonian production. These pottery finds are evidence of the Hanseatic trade route from Lübeck to Russia, particularly Novgorod.

This Slavonic pottery is the first archaeological evidence from medieval contacts between Nyland and the Baltic countries or North-western Russia. From historical sources we know that the connections to Tallinn in Estonia have been lively at least from the early 14th century onwards.¹¹ A route from Blekinge via the southern coast of Finland to Tallinn is described already in a Danish itinerary from the mid 13th century.¹² From two of the places mentioned in this itinerary – Hangö and Ors – we have also, during the last year, gotten some early medieval archaeological evidence.

Expansive colonisation or several setbacks?

Traditionally Nyland has been seen as an area of intensive colonisation during the whole medieval period. As a result of this colonisation there were ca 2500 farms in 750 hamlets or settlement sites in

Western Nyland in the middle of the 16th century.¹³ They were divided in eight parishes and ca 100 tax areas called *bol*. However the amount of *bol*s was practically the same in 1451 and the amount of farms seem to be on the same level already in 1413.¹⁴ The last 100-150 years of the medieval period can hardly be called a period of intensive colonisation!

The historical records themselves are important in analysing the landscape. We have collected detailed information on every single mid 16th century hamlet in the province. On 17th and 18th century maps most of the locations where these hamlets have existed can be found. Thanks to these sources we can locate the medieval settlement-sites and the small fields around them. Furthermore an analysis of historical maps and tax records has revealed ca 40 deserted medieval hamlets. Many reasons, such as wars and crop failures can have caused the desertion of farms. Some of the settlement sites might be totally deserted but in several other cases, the inhabitants have moved to another place. Some general changes have already been traced especially in the very coastal zone where land uplift has changed the environment and forced people to move closer to the sea. Some settlements might have been deserted because of the infamous 14th century plague, the Black Death. From Kullåkersbacken, we have archaeological evidence that it has been abandoned in the middle of the 14th century or during the decades of the Black Death.¹⁵

The role of the nobility in the colonisation

According to the traditional view the nobility didn't take any significant part in the Swedish colonization of Nyland. Instead it has been seen as an immigration of independent peasants.¹⁶ However, an analyse of the land ownership reveals several early manors. Each of them is situated in central locations along ancient waterways or on the coastal road joining Åbo and Viborg/Viipuri castles. All these manors have originally been surrounded by a couple of tenant farms or a fief as well. Similar noble impact has been revealed from other coastal regions in Finland, such as in the northern part of Finland Proper and the vicinity of Viborg/Viipuri.¹⁷ Furthermore it seems that in Nyland these noble families have taken an active role in establishing of parish churches in at least Tenala, Pojo, Karis, Ingå and Sjundeå. (Fig. 3)

A chain of royal demesnes

In the late 13th century it seems that in the southern and eastern part of Finland Proper a chain of royal demesnes was established. These demesnes were situated along a coastal route about 20 to 30 kilometres from each other. Kustö/Kuusisto and Runagård/Ruonankartano are located in Finland Proper. Helgä/Pyhäjoki lay on the boarder of the late medieval counties of Åbo and Raseborg.¹⁸ In the western part of Nyland were Skavistad and Ramsjö. The earliest mention of Skavistad in Pojo is already in the will of 'drots' Mathias Kettilmundsson.¹⁹ Previously Skavistad has not been identified as a royal demesne. However it consisted of a fief almost identical to those in Helgä, Runagård and Kustö. Ramsö is once, in 1461, called a former royal manor.²⁰ (Fig. 4)

An exactly similar chain of royal demesnes was established in Helsingland, another province integrated into the Swedish realm during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. These demesnes served to organize colonization in border areas to bolster the authority of the Swedish crown and were centres for tax collection and administration. Situated along roads and waterways they also offered accommodation for people in the service of the crown.²¹ Later during the 14th century the castle of Raseborg was built and the crown no longer needed the demesnes in Nyland anymore.

Conclusion

Despite that Nyland has been studied during the last century large coastal areas were still unknown to archaeological and historical researchers. When these areas were studied during the last three years it was shown that the late Iron Age and medieval settlement history of the area have not been properly understood. In the coastal and archipelagic zones there has been agriculture and occupation from the middle Iron Age onwards. Already in the Iron Age the maritime landscape has been important, as is shown by the many finds and burial cairns all over the area. The first archaeological indications of uninterrupted occupation on at least some of the settlements founded during the Iron Age have now been found.

Furthermore, some early medieval settlement sites, such as Hangö by, Kullåkersbacken, Köklax and Ors, have also been located and excavated. From these coastal sites there is new archaeological evidence of medieval connections to both Western and Eastern Europe. Future analysis of these sites can provide much new information on the human activities, resource utilization and settlement history in Nyland. One of the results we already have is that a significant part of the settlement sites were

during the medieval times, connected to the maritime landscape, and settlement dynamics were related to the local land uplift. As we can see from e.g. Busö and Ors the sites were deserted when the distance to the sea grew too much.

Nyland has always been characterised as an area of medieval colonisation conducted by the Swedes. Previously this colonisation has been seen as an immigration of independent peasants. As a new result a significant noble impact has been verified both in the colonisation activity itself and the establishing of parish churches as well.

In the early 14th century the province of Nyland had a bailiff, a judge and an ecclesiastic tax collector as well as a seal of its own. During the same time a chain of royal demesnes connected this area to Finland Proper and Turku. The western part of Nyland, the county of Raseborg was soon organised into eight parishes. When the Swedish realm was consolidated during the 13th and early 14th centuries Nyland was a well-organised province and not a mere area of colonisation.²²

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Figure 1. Western Nyland.



Figure 2. Important archaeological sites mentioned in the article.

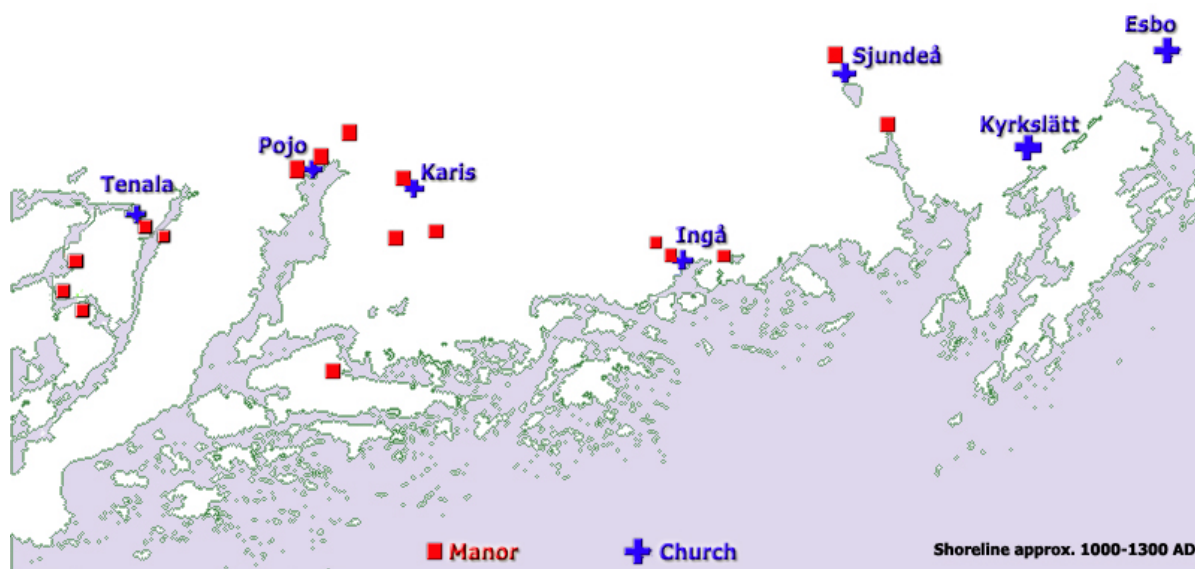


Figure 3. Medieval noble manors and parish churches.

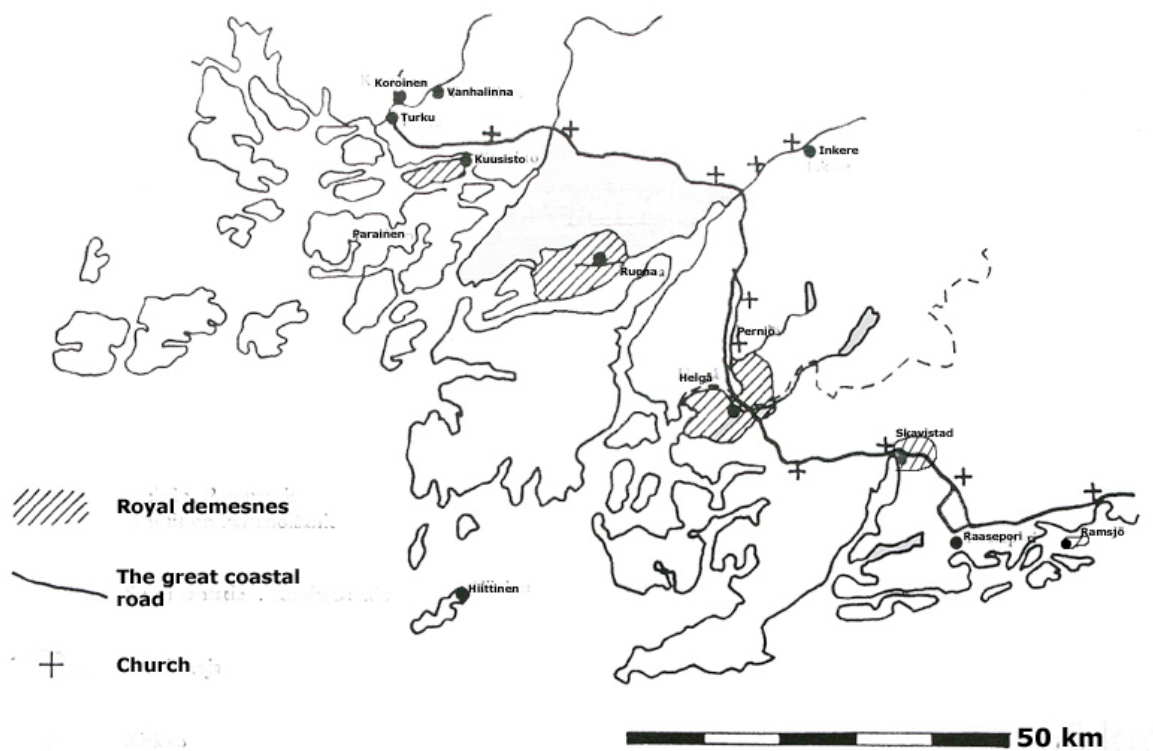


Figure 4. High medieval royal demesnes.

Notes

- ¹ The two other members of our project are biologist Teija Alenius and geologist Arto Miettinen.
- ² Kerkkonen 1945; Meinander 1983; Orrman 1990.
- ³ Finlands medeltidsurkunder (FMU) 6572.
- ⁴ Kerkkonen 1947.; Bidrag till Finlands historia (BFH) I, p. 305.
- ⁵ Alenius, Haggrén, Jansson & Miettinen 2004.
- ⁶ Drake 1991; Jäkärä 1998; Suhonen 2002.
- ⁷ Broberg & Svensson 1987; Haggrén 2002, p. 20-24.
- ⁸ Haggrén, Jansson & Pihlman 2003.
- ⁹ Jansson, in prep.
- ¹⁰ Haggrén, Enqvist, Hakanpää & Wuorisalo 2003.
- ¹¹ Kerkkonen 1949.
- ¹² Gallén 1993.
- ¹³ Suomen asutus 1560-luvulla 1973, p. 154-178.
- ¹⁴ Kerkkonen 1945, p. 113-117.
- ¹⁵ Haggrén, Jansson & Pihlman 2003.
- ¹⁶ Lindqvist 2002, p. 47.
- ¹⁷ Haggrén 2004, Kaukiainen 1975.
- ¹⁸ Haggrén 1997, p. 33-37.
- ¹⁹ Finlands medeltidsurkunder (FMU) 328.
- ²⁰ Finland medeltidsurkunder (FMU) 3156.
- ²¹ Mogren 2000, p. 165-170.
- ²² Cfr. Harrison 2002.