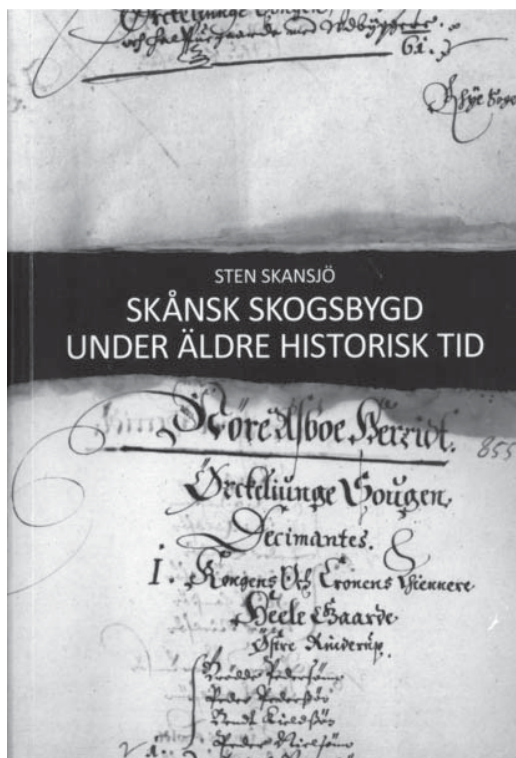




Anglert, Mats (ed.), 2008. *Landskap bortom traditionen. Historisk arkeologi i nordvästra Skåne*. Riksantikvarieämbetet, Stockholm. ISBN 978-91-7209-523-6. 287 p.

MUCH TO BE LEARNED FROM RECENT RESEARCH ON THE FOREST REGION OF NORTHWESTERN SCANIA

In two fairly new publications concerning the forest region of northwestern Scania (present-day Sweden), experts on historical archaeology and culture history unveil very interesting data about the medieval and later periods of this region. The research was made possible by the building of the E4-highway stretching over present Sweden from north to south, in Scania running mainly through the municipalities of Örkelljunga and Skånes-Fagerhult. This provided financing to a large interdisciplinary project. This gave post-medieval archaeologists an opportunity to conduct research in a vast area, ask new questions and test



Skansjö, Sten 2010. *Skånsk skogsbygd under äldre historisk tid*. Riksantikvarieämbetet, Stockholm. ISBN 978-91-7209-562-5. 239 p

new methods, including natural scientific ones. The long time-perspective, free of 'ageism', has been fruitful and the resulting books are also very reader-friendly.

The area under discussion was a part of Denmark during the medieval and post-medieval times, except for the period ca. 1330-1360 when it was under Swedish rule. Following a series of wars, the area fell under Swedish jurisdiction in 1658. In both publications this period of change has been noted and studied e.g. with view to taxation: here the individual farmers and farms clearly have had a role to play in the large-scale events. Nowadays this area bordering the province of Småland mostly consists of pine forest, but these woods have short roots as they are a result of modern forestry and depopulation, which took

place as a result of industrialisation as late as the late 19th century. As a positive side-effect, the late introduction of forestry has functioned as a conserving factor in the landscape.

VIEWS PRESENTED IN THE ANTHOLOGY

The anthology *Landskap bortom traditionen*, published in 2008, consists of a number of extended articles concerning Norra Åsbo, that is, the present-day municipalities of Örkelljunga and Skånes-Fagerhult. The main focus is on presenting the results of archaeological and palaeobotanical research, conducted in an area where such research has been scarce due, for example, to the lack of monumental burials. As the area was little known archaeologically, the results of the project shed new light on its history of settlements, demography and economy, which may be compared with the known facts concerning the history of Scania and Småland. Moreover, it sheds light on conditions on the border zone between the kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark.

The anthology is richly illustrated with good, colourful and informative pictures, and contains much general information that could be extremely useful for any student of archaeology – this book could very well be included in an exam of Scandinavian archaeology also in Finland. One of the new results presented is that this area, formerly viewed as periphery, now appears to have been a very dynamic landscape in the past. It is obvious that Norra Åsbo has not been ‘marginal’, but a flourishing area with a diversity of economic strategies based on forestry. Thus it seems that the picture of how economy was formed in medieval times in northern Scania differs from the overall European picture based on agrarian economy. It is a good and provoking result – a ‘landscape beyond tradition’.

The first article by Mats Anglert presents the backgrounds and conditions of the project itself, including some research history as well as the hypotheses of the project and its strive for a holistic view in the primary results. The results indicate that the area was colonized late and by single farms of independent farmers, i.e. mostly on crown land. In the late 14th century a border fortress seems to have existed for a short time in Örkelljunga near the church. In his next article, Anglert examines in more detail the different types of monuments and traces of the fossil

landscape in the area. This could be very useful reading for a comparison with other similar forested areas (e.g. in Finland!) In another article Anglert also stresses of the network of communication (roads, people, the spread of a certain type of loft houses), and Mats Morgen makes good points on how we now often see borders as lines, whereas the medieval society viewed borders as areas in the landscape in connection to people¹, which of course is crucial in the study of old borderline areas. He makes fruitful comparisons to the national borders between Sweden and Norway and – interestingly enough – also to the medieval Swedish border in the east (in present-day Finland), and ventilates these issues with a fresh approach.

Iron production seems to have been of vast importance in the region. According to Bo Strömberg’s article the late medieval economic expansion in the entire border region seems to have resulted from the Danish crown’s interest in iron-producing settlers. This changed when the area became a marginal border zone of the Realm of Sweden. The Swedish production of iron had its centre in the north and thus the proto-industrial iron production in Northern Scania was no longer supported and the area became largely forested. However, the border does not seem to have been cemented before the 18th century and the beginning of nation-building and creation of invented traditions for constructing identities, as Stefan Larsson points out in the last article of the book. He also writes a few interesting pages about the myth of the ‘rebels’ against the Swedish crown in the area in the 17th century, i.e. the notorious ‘*snapphanarna*’ who, Larsson claims, are more a later product of fiction than a real historical phenomenon.

SKANSJÖ’S DETAILED SYNTHESIS FROM 2010

Sten Skansjö’s work published in 2010 offers a new synthesis consisting of interesting, but sometimes quite tiresome details, in comparison to the big picture concerning the history of the area. This type of basic research is still most welcome alongside the general views more commonly presented. He often refers to work from the first half of the 20th century, which tells us much about the state of research and thus the importance of his own study.

Skansjö's work focuses on the few historical records which may be connected to the data gathered from the field, including cultural/geological interpretations drawn from old maps, etc. The archaeologically gathered data could in my opinion have been used more extensively, but the research still presents many deep and detailed angles to the area of Norra Åsbo. Archaeological material is amply used when iron production is discussed, and hopefully this could set an example for other forested areas too.

In the first half of the book we get a good glimpse of medieval and late medieval conditions in the study area. Anybody doing research in a similar forested area should definitely read this study. Difficulties in dating objects, sources and structures that are very sparse, uncertainty of studying phenomena older than the 16th century – all of this is familiar e.g. to us working in Finland, and we might well say to Skansjö that he is most welcome to join the club.

The subject is very well presented without 'ageism', and especially the 17th century conditions are much emphasized in the book – and they are, of course, important since it is all about the formation of the area under Swedish rule and the dramatic changes in the history of the region. Through the records we can see both general economic tendencies as well as find the individuals on their farms (presented in lists in the appendices for the more demanding reader). This study could hopefully set a new example on how to present the results of research in similar areas.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In both publications a great effort has been made to depict the area as a border zone between two states for an extensive period of time (from late Iron Age to the 19th century). Both publications also present the new research data in a very thorough manner, which is fresh and welcome. Thanks to the wide geographic perspective, new questions could be posed – some of them were answered, some still require further research. The authors state that the lack of research concerning the prehistoric periods remains a problem, e.g. concerning the question whether the area was colonized before the late medieval period or only then.

This project could teach us much on the question of how to study the forested areas in eastern

Finland. Moreover, the Western- and Central-Finnish populated areas of the past could also be compared to research conducted in the forested parts of Scania, rather than studies of farmlands further south that bear more resemblance to Central Europe. For example, in Norra Åsbo the church buildings seem to have been founded quite late, in the 16th century (the earliest dating to the 13th century), which is also the case in most parts of Finland. Comparisons with Southern Scania have been more common, mainly owing to the numerous and well available publications (by Lars Ersgård, Janken Myrdal and others), but hopefully this could be revised now.

The problems caused by the lack of research in the forested areas of Finland were recently (in May 2011) discussed at a seminar at the National Board of Antiquities in Helsinki. Thus, these two highly recommended publications will work as excellent guides on how to approach similar cases in Finnish medieval and post-medieval archaeology and interdisciplinary research. We could perhaps similarly shift our focus from areas with monumental burials and 'large population' to ones with remains relating to the smelting of iron or burning of tar. Some steps to this direction have been taken, but much remains to be done. Has forestry had the same conserving influence in the landscape here as in Scania – and hence, could new data be similarly available? Maybe the truth will be out here, too, and help us form a more diverse picture of settlement history and past human activities.

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NOTES

1 Thus, any views made on settlements and state-building must also consider the status of border areas: *'Gränsen går alltså vid denna tid mellan den ene furstens bortersta undersåte och den angränsande furstens dito. Därav följer att en gräns i praktiken egentligen är yta snarare än linje och att gränsproblematik är ouppslösligt förbunden med bebyggelseproblematik och statsbildningsproblematik'* (Mogren's article, p. 207).

