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"AL TING AER FORGAENGELICH..."¹

EXCAVATIONS AT THE MEDIEVAL MANOR OF SVIDJA IN 1996-1997

Abstract

In 1996-1997, archaeological salvage excavations were carried out at the medieval manor of Svidja (Fi. Suitia), Southern Finland, due to the renovation of the 16th-century stone manor house and its adjacent buildings. At the west end of the manor house, remains of three timber buildings dating from about AD 1500-1650, i.e. the flourishing period of the ownership of the powerful Fleming family, were unearthed. A variety of artefacts, such as stoneware and glass vessels, indicate a very high social status and Central-European connections. Moreover, the researched bone material and macrofossil plant remains have given information on nutrition. Despite the wide area covered by trenches around the manor house, no clear signs of activity prior to the 16th century were found.

Keywords: Finland, Siuntio, Sjundeå, Suitia, Svidja, manor, Fleming, timber buildings, Middle Ages, Renaissance, stoneware, glass, material culture.

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THE MANOR OF SVIDJA IN THE TIDE OF TIME

The manor of Svidja (Fi. Suitia) is situated in Sjundeå (Fi. Siuntio), Southern Finland, about 1.5 kilometres northwest of the medieval parish church (Fig. 1). The oldest surviving document of the estate, called "Syrjä" in that time, dates from 1420.² The first known owner of the medieval manor, by the year 1460, was the *lagman* of the judicial district of Raseborg and the bailiff of Häme castle, Björn Ragvaldsson, but the estate was probably already possessed by his father, Ragvald Ragvaldsson.³ The location of the earliest, wooden manor house is not known. Around 1494 Svidja was transferred to Björn's son-in-law Joakim Fleming, a member of the Council of the Realm, and it became one of the main residences of the family.⁴

Joakim's son, Council member, *lagman* and military commander Eric Fleming (1487- 1548)⁵ had the still existing grey granite main building built, and Svidja

became his main estate along with Qvidja (Fi. Kuitia) at Pargas (Fi. Parainen).⁶ In 1540 six limestone window frames, a lavatorium basin and blocks for a fireplace were ordered from Thomas Thomasson, a "stonemason" of Tallinn. Thomas was also the supervisor for the construction work initiated in 1541. The building was completed in 1545, or not later than 1550, when a limestone coat-of-arms of Eric Fleming and Hebla Siggesdotter Sparre was placed over the main entrance. The manor house, measuring 29 x 8.5 metres, had a large barrel-vaulted basement and two living floors, both probably consisting of two rooms and a narrow hall in the middle, as well as a tower-like structure, possibly serving as a stairway.⁷ In 1539 apple and pear plants were ordered from Tallinn for one of the first orchards planted in Finland. Eric Fleming also founded an industrial iron foundry in the environs by the 1540s.⁸ At that time there were 17-18 tenant farmers belonging to Svidja.⁹

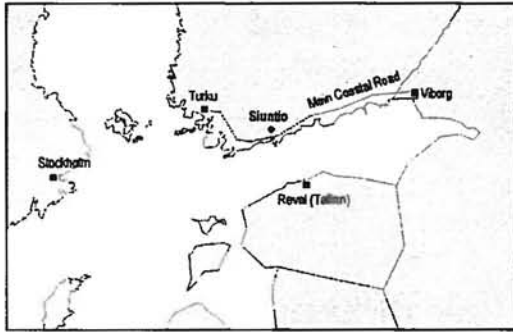
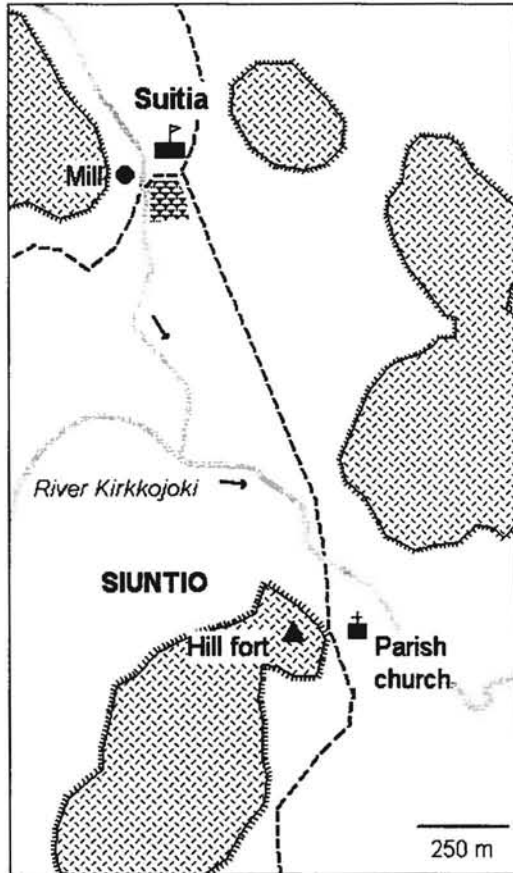


Fig. 1. The location of Sjudenå and the manor of Svidja. The stone parish church was most probably constructed at the end of the 15th century, and the unexcavated hill fort opposite dates possibly from the Late Iron Age. The Ekeberga burial cemetery is from the 4th century AD.



King Gustavus Vasa stayed at Svidja in December 1555 during a journey in Finland. In 1560 Eric's son Claes (1535-1597) inherited the manor.¹⁰ Together with his father, Claes was one of the most powerful and wealthiest persons in the history of the country. He was the Admiral of State, Gustavus Vasa's brother-in-law and a trusted person for the later King John (Sw. Johan) III, who even appointed him the governor of Finland and Estonia.¹¹ Claes was known for his greed and arrogance towards peasants and bailiffs, which was one of the factors leading to a major peasant uprising in 1596-

1597, known as the Club War.¹² After Claes' death in 1597 Svidja was transferred to his son John, who was executed two years later for his actions against Duke Carl (Carl IX 1599-1611).¹³ From 1599 to 1602 Svidja was withdrawn to the Crown.¹⁴ For over one hundred years the owners stayed at the manor only occasionally, except for a short period during the ownership of Eric Fleming af Lais in 1664-1679, when e.g. a mill with a dammed pond was constructed in the vicinity of the main building. The fields were cultivated by bailiffs and tenant farmers. According to tax rolls from 1694, the main building was in bad condition and uninhabitable. There were a couple of wooden buildings and storehouses in the yard as well as a few wooden outbuildings a short distance from the manor.¹⁵

Svidja was in the possession of the Fleming heirs until 1730, when it was purchased by General Carl Henrik Wrangel who had a wooden two-storeyed dwelling built beside the masonry building which had suffered even more damage during the war in 1714-21.¹⁶ Baron Esbjörn Christian Reuterholm bought the estate in 1754, and the new wooden main building together with its significant archives burned down four years later. After this occasion Reuterholm let raze the upper part of the old stone house and rebuild it of brick, probably fired in the manor's own kiln. A new annex was built of the demolished stones next to the main building.¹⁷ The manor was owned by the heirs of Reuterholm until 1817, after which it changed hands several times from one family to another. In the last quarter of the 19th century Svidja belonged to Major General von Kraemer, who transformed the front yard into a park. The last private proprietor was Baron August Wrede af Elimä who renovated the main building in a romantic Neo-Gothic style in 1898-99, adding the stepped gables, round tower, and kitchen wing (Fig. 2). The Finnish government bought the estate in 1934 after the bankruptcy of Wrede, and a home for disabled veterans was established on the premises.¹⁸ The care of the manor was transferred to the University of Helsinki in 1975.

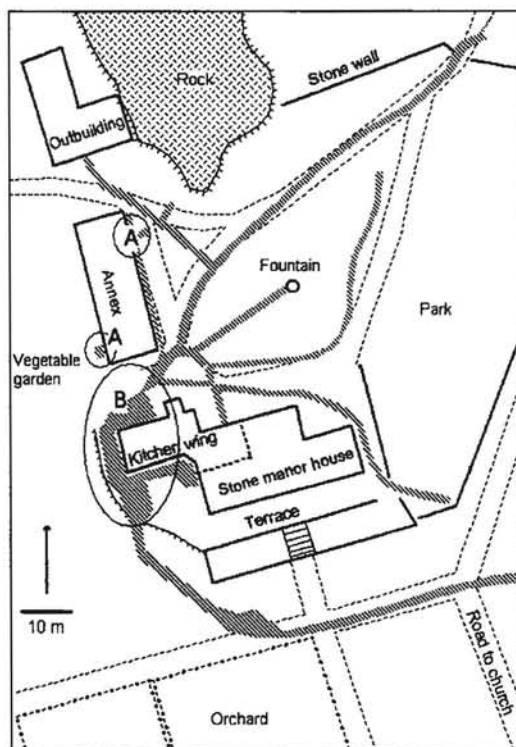


Fig. 2. The stone manor house seen from the southeast. Photo M. Niukkanen.

THE EXCAVATIONS IN 1996-1997

The restoration programme of Svidja manor, drawn up by the National Board of Antiquities of Finland was completed in 1991. Archaeological test sections as well as a vegetation analysis were carried out in the grounds in the same year.¹⁹ Restoration executed by the University of Helsinki commenced in 1996 by the renewal of the drainage and heating systems as well as reinforcing the foundations of the kitchen wing and the annex. All pipe trenches next to the manor and its yard, totalling 590 metres, were surveyed by archaeologists for five months in 1996 (supervised by the author) and 1997 (supervised by Liisa Seppänen, BA), and cultural layers and structures were excavated and documented (Fig. 3). The macrofossil samples were researched by docent Terttu Lempiäinen, and Niklas Söderholm,

Fig. 3. General plan of the manor yard and the surveyed trenches (shaded). A = remains of the wooden main building from 1730, burned down in 1758, B = remains of three timber buildings from about 1500-1650. The orchard to the south of the manor consists of four equal squares and may have originate from the 16th century.



BA, analysed part of the bone material. At the time of writing only preliminary results of these analyses were available.

Most of the trenches in the front yard and in the park and fruit garden were empty or comprised only recent garden structures and fills. There was a great deal of blast furnace slag in the surface layers; according to documents concerning the renovation of the manor house carried out in the 1760s, the building and the new annex were fitted with roofs covered with birchbark and slag, and at least the manor was replaced with a tile roof in 1801.²⁰ By the east wall of the annex, remains of a burned wooden building and a cellar pit were revealed. For example animal bones and redware pots were found in the pit, which had been filled with earth and building waste. The fire layer continued at the west side of the annex, where a coin dating from 1724 was found. The remains are most probably those of the new wooden dwelling built by General Wrangel in the 1730s which burned down in 1758.

STRUCTURES NEXT TO THE KITCHEN WING

By the kitchen wing, which was constructed at the west end of the manor house in 1898-99, several structures of different time periods were unearthed, lying at a depth of up to 3.5 metres. The earliest discovery was a hearth which in view of its altitude (40 metres a.s.l.) and

earlier finds in the district, dates probably from the later Mesolithic Stone Age, ca. 7 500 – 6 200 BP.²¹

Building 1

The first proper building on the spot was constructed around AD 1500 (Fig. 4a). The dating is based on stratigraphy and finds. Remains of a cellar were found, but the upper parts of the building had been destroyed by later action. The cellar had been dug into sandy ground and sided with timber planks, and there had been an incline or staircase leading down from the east. The layer on the floor contained kitchen waste, such as fragments of iron pots, a hand quern and kitchen flint, as well as masses of animal and fish bones. Large amounts of window glass were found, but only a couple of pass-glas sherds. Pottery included a few sherds of lead-glazed and unglazed redware pots and Rhenish and Lower Saxon stoneware dating from about 1475-1545 (Fig. 5). In addition, a fairly large amount of forge slag, pieces of so called Hessian crucibles²² and numerous iron objects and their fragments point to metalworking (Fig. 6).

The analysed bone material from the kitchen waste layer includes common domestic animals known to have been raised at the estate by the 1540s²³, such as cattle (*Bos taurus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), goat (*Capra hircus*), pig (*Sus scrofa f. domestica*), horse (*Equus*

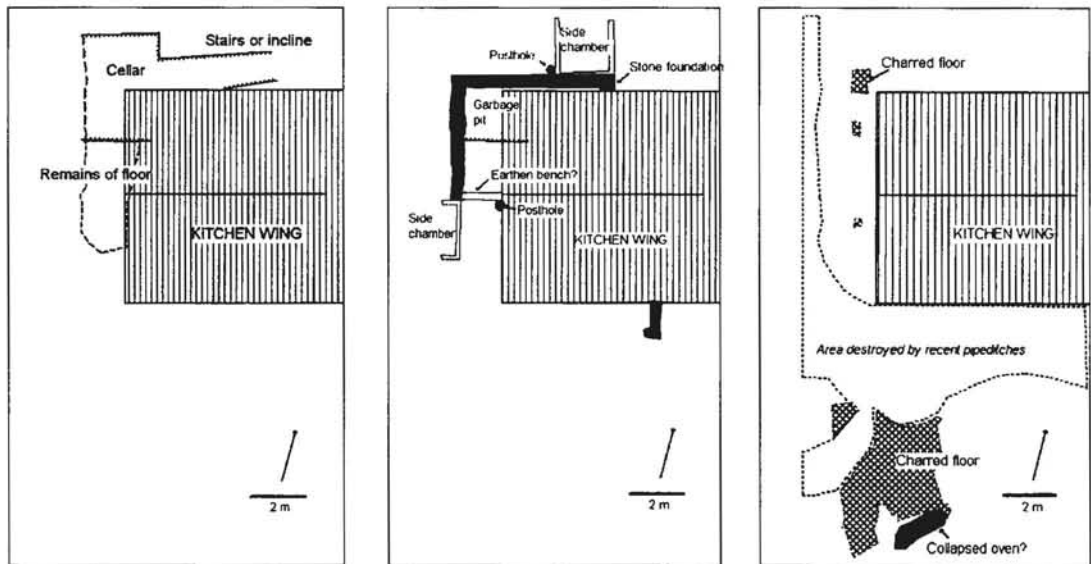


Fig. 4. Schematic plan of the three partly excavated timber buildings. 4a = building 1, ca. 1500-1550, 4b = building 2, ca. 1550-1600, 4c = building 3, ca. 1600-1650

Fig. 5. Pottery from building 1 comprises sherds of inside lead-glazed redware, Cologne and Duingen stoneware and unglazed white ware fired at a very high temperature. A few fragments belong to an unglazed redware jar (far right) that referring to its fabric can be of a Mediterranean origin. Photo M. Niukkanen.

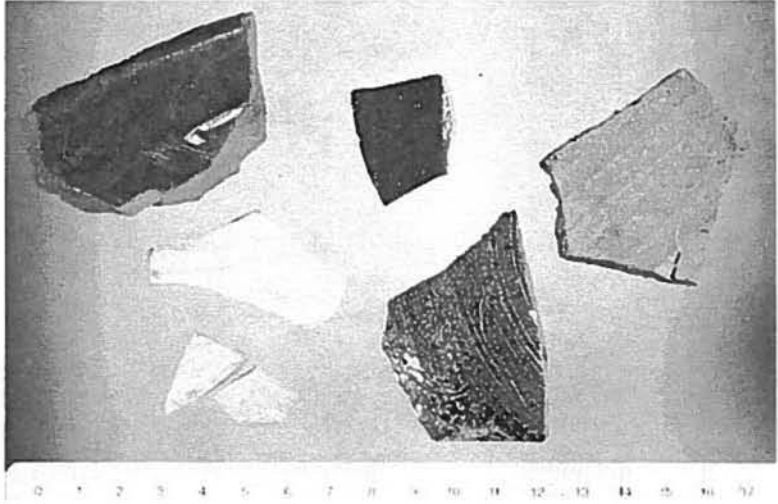


Fig. 6. Fragments of so called Hessian crucibles found in buildings 1 and 2. Photo M. Niukkanen.

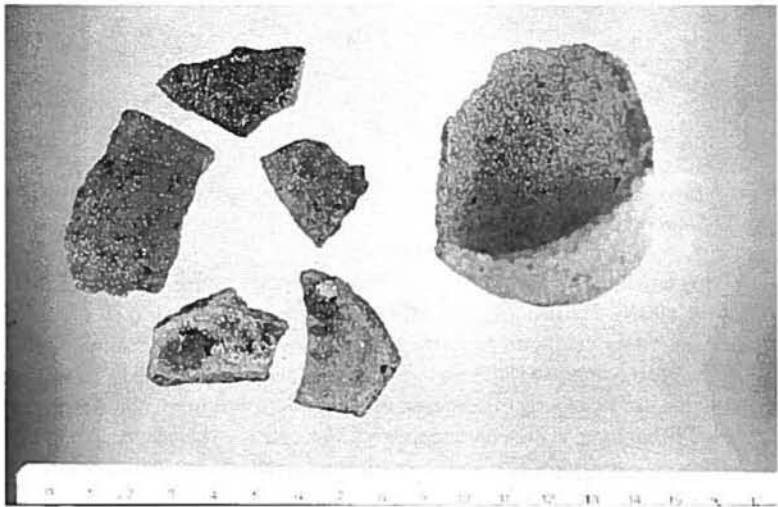


Fig. 7. Remains of the cellar of building 1 from the south, later used as a refuse pit. The foundation of building 2 in the back. Photo M. Niukkanen.



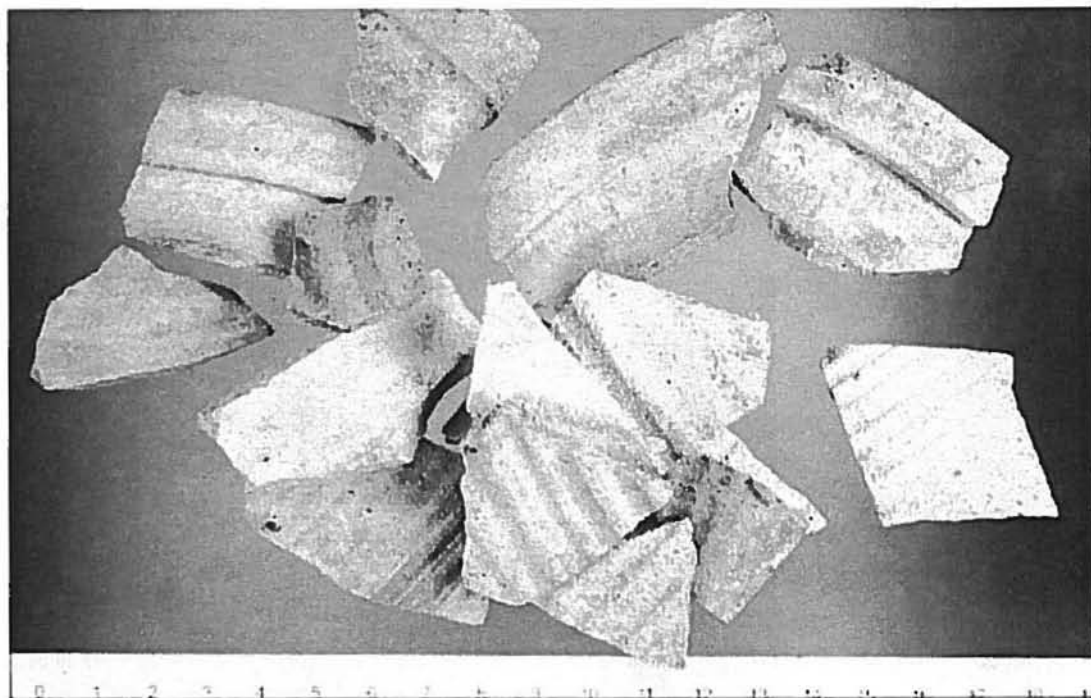


Fig. 8. Fragments of Bohemian or Saxon near stoneware jars with brown and black painted decoration from building 2. Photo M. Niukkanen.

caballus) and hen (*Gallus domesticus*) – cattle bones dominate clearly. The majority of the material consists of meatless bones, i.e. animal parts discarded in slaughter.²⁴ The great number of cattle-metapodials may also point to the manufacturing of combs or other bone artefacts.²⁵ In addition, at least hare (*Lepus timidus*), elk (*Alces alces*), seal (*Phocidae* and *Pusa hispida*), and squirrel (*Sqarius vulgaris*) as well as wild fowl, for example swan (*Cygnus sp.*), wood grouse (*Tetrao urogallus*) and wild duck (*Anatidae.*) were hunted – also crossbow arrowheads were found in the same layer as the bones. Among the numerous fish bones, pike (*Esox lucius*), perch (*Perca fluviatilis*), and cod (*Gadus morhua*) could be distinguished. Also rats (*Rattus rattus*) and cats (*Felix catus*) had found their way in the building. Some bones have the tooth marks of a dog or a rodent.²⁶

Building 2

The next building was erected on the remains of the first around the middle of the 16th century (Fig. 4b). The previous cellar was filled with gravel, cracked bricks, and mortar. Some of the bricks are strongly sooted on

one side, which probably means that they were demolished from a fireplace belonging to a building preceding the stone manor house. Limestone fragments and moulded bricks were found in the fill as well, which may indicate the construction of the masonry manor beside. Also datable finds in the fill fit with the known construction time of the manor house.²⁷ A part of the previous cellar was preserved in the new building, serving now as a refuse pit. The timber house had a well-

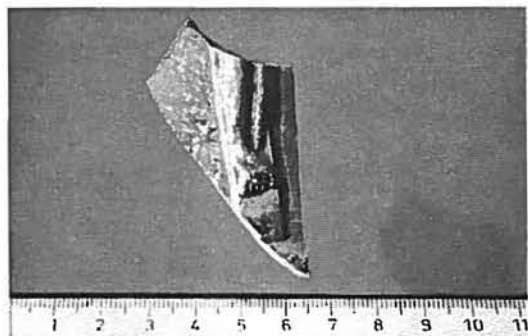


Fig. 9. Fragment of a salt-glazed stoneware tankard with a crucifix motif, made in Waldenburg in Saxony. Found in building 2. Photo M. Niukkanen.



Fig. 10. Renaissance stove-tile fragments from building 2. The right tile is glazed green and yellow and decorated with a female portrait bust, possibly of Margareta Vasa (deceased 1537). (Gaimster, pers. comm. 15.5.1998). Mould-identical tiles have been found at the Aboa Vetus site in Turku and at Turku Castle (Majantie, pers. comm. 12.5.1998). The left, green-glazed, tile is decorated with a lily motif. Photo M. Niukkanen.

made masonry foundation at the north and west sides, whereas the south wall was probably built on an earth bench foundation (Fig. 7). Both the north and south walls were supported by a post from the outside. The house had one larger room, measuring approximately 4.5 x 6 metres, and at least two side chambers, both built on light stone foundations. The precise plan could not be worked out as the building lay partly under the present kitchen wing and it had also been destroyed to some extent by recent unsurveyed pipe ditches.

The roughly one-metre-thick refuse layer in the previous cellar as well as other layers in the building contained numerous imported artefacts, most of which indicate high social status and connections with Central Europe. Pottery comprises sherds of dozens of red- and whiteware tripod pipkins, slip-decorated dishes and bowls, Bohemian-Saxon near-stoneware pots as well as Cologne, Raeren, Waldenburg and Duingen stoneware jugs (Fig. 8, 9).²⁸ Two majolica fragments originate from a tazza manufactured in Montelupo, Tuscany

Fig. 11. X-ray picture of two knives from building 2. The upper has a handle of wood and a bronze spiral, the lower is bone-handled. Photo E. Toivari.



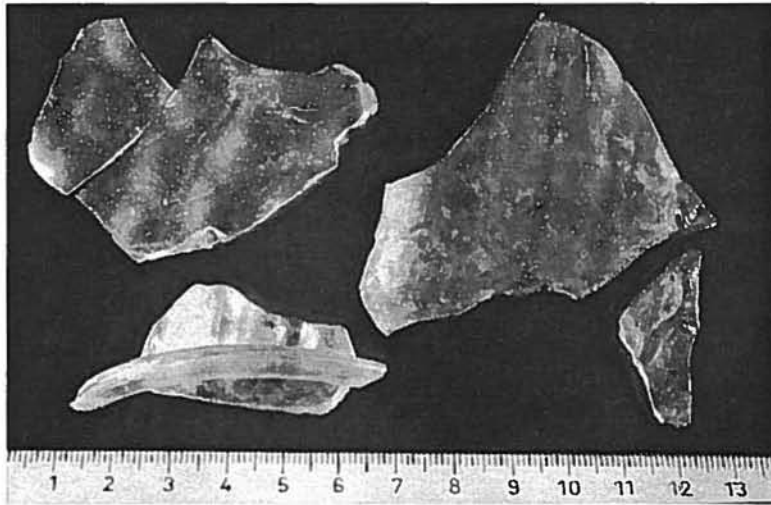


Fig. 12. Sherds of clear bottles with optical decoration and a pedestal foot of a beaker from building 3. Photo M. Niukkanen.

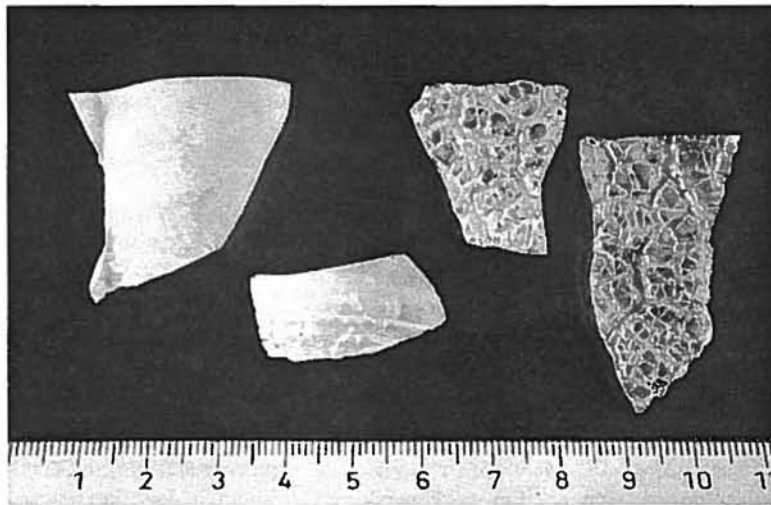


Fig. 13. Sherds of renaissance ice-glass vessels from building 3. Venetian or Dutch *façon de Venise*, second half of the 16th century. Photo M. Niukkanen.

around 1575-1625.²⁹ Fragments of Hessian crucibles were also found in this layer.

The other remarkable find category is glass, including sherds of several German *passglases* and *keulenglasses*, *façon de Venise* filigree glasses and a richly decorated goblet, two beakers with enamelling and gold-leaf gilding, a beaker with optical decoration and a cobalt-blue spiral trail, and bottles.³⁰ Furthermore, decoratively shaped window glass as well as some glazed and relief-decorated Renaissance stove tiles tell about an affluent and comfortable life (Fig. 10). A bone comb, buckles, decorated knives, gold thread from a cloth, a bone knob of a possible musical instrument, and two Swedish silver coins from 1578 and 1592 can be classified as personal items (Fig. 11). Animal and fish bones, which still remain unanalysed, as well as egg and mussel shells³¹ tell about the diet. The researched mac-

rofossil plant remains have revealed that at least raspberries (*Rubus idaeus*) and hazelnuts (*Corylus avellana*) were additions to daily fare.³²

The excavated timber building was probably constructed around the same time as the stone manor house next to it. According to e.g. coin finds, the building was still in use in the late 16th century. It is known that buildings at Svidja were damaged during the Club War in 1597 and two years later by the troops of Duke Carl.³³ The building may have been destroyed in these conflicts.

Building 3

The remains of the building had been covered with a layer of sand, and a third timber building had been erected on the spot (Fig. 4c). An area of charred floor planks and

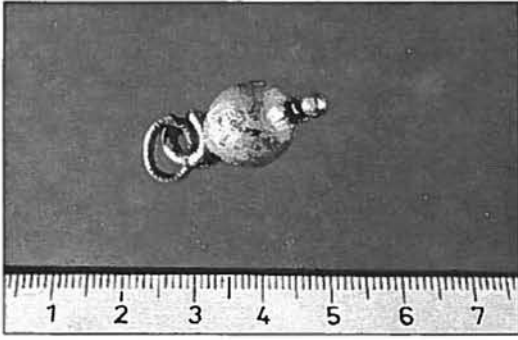


Fig. 14. A gold-plated button or pendant from building 3, end-16th century. Photo M. Niukkanen.

a stone setting damaged by fire, possibly a collapsed oven, were unearthed. The width of the building was at least four metres, but the size and plan of the house could not be interpreted from its widely scattered remains, as several recent pipe ditches had been dug across them. Numerous finds were collected among the burned remains, such as redware and a few sherds of Cologne and Duingen stoneware, bottle and window glass, a thimble and a pin, two Swedish silver coins from 1572 and 1592, and several iron objects. The glass material includes a cobalt-blue angular bottle with an enamelled plant motive, clear bottles with optical decoration, sherds of clear beakers with chequered spiral trails, *façon de Venise* filigree glasses, *passglas* sherds, and fragments of Renaissance ice-glass vessels (Fig. 12, 13). The glass material is likely to be of Dutch, Bohemian, Saxon, or even Venetian origin. One of the most luxurious finds was a gold-plated globular button or pendant (Fig. 14).

The finds can be dated to the period between the end of the 16th and middle of the 17th century; the dating is also supported by the absence of clay pipes and faience. However, the coin from 1592 found in the preceding building gives a *terminus post quem* date to this dwelling. A surviving document from 1664 tells that a year earlier in April a bakery, a storehouse and eight dwellings, of which several were described as old and rotten were destroyed by fire at Svidja, as well as numerous movables, such as foodstuffs, furniture, household items, and garments.³⁴ The discovered remains may belong to one of these old timber buildings.

After the fire of the third building, a road was constructed on the levelled ruins. Four separate sand and gravel layers could be distinguished in the road, the uppermost being set with sparsely laid cobblestones. In the oldest surviving map of Svidja by Gottfried Ihn

from 1770³⁵, a road is marked in the spot leading to the manor house from the southwest. However, in accordance with the archaeological observations, it seems that the road was established already around the mid-17th century. Furthermore, a foundation made of discarded bricks, probably belonging to an outbuilding, was dug in the road at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Within the foundation, a small heap of green window and bottle glass, glazed stove tiles, clay pipe fragments, as well as a fragment of a porcelain bowl with Chinese-style decoration were discovered.

CONCLUSIONS

The front yard of the manor was largely devoid of cultural layers or structures and contained no signs of activity prior to the 18th century, which may be the result of displacing soil in park works of the late 19th century, or of intensive tidying of the representative yard. All the excavated cultural layers and building remains earlier than the 1730s lay superimposed in a small area on an artificially levelled terrace at the west end of the manor. However, all the dwellings mentioned in the sources could not have been placed on the terrace, and even though the surroundings of the main building were widely investigated, no other built activity areas were discovered. They were probably located more to the west or southwest towards the river where no pipe ditches were dug.

All structures were dated by stratigraphy and finds, as no useful dendrochronological samples could be taken. According to the finds it seems that the manor was still inhabited by noblemen for a few decades after the Club War. However, no material from the period 1650s-1720s came to light. Most discoveries are from the flourishing era of Eric and Claes Fleming, and the variety of finds indicates a high social status as well as a luxurious lifestyle, providing interesting material for further study of consumption patterns and comparisons with other materials collected within noble contexts. Stoneware is mainly from the Rhenish, Saxon and Lower Saxon regions, but Siegburg and Westerwald stoneware appear to be missing. The unquestionably luxurious glass material is of Dutch, Saxon, Bohemian and Venetian origin. Many items still lack parallels in other Finnish, and even Baltic archaeological materials of the epoch, and they may be gifts from foreign noblemen – Claes Fleming had direct contacts with the Polish nobility through Duke John.

Although the manor's history goes back to at least

the beginning of the 15th century, no structures or artefacts can definitely be dated to before the 16th century. Therefore it is probable that the possible earliest buildings possessed by the Ragvaldssons might have been located elsewhere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful to Dr. David R.M. Gaimster of the British Museum for looking through the excavated ceramic material.

NOTES

- ¹ "All things perish..." Text fragment from the limestone coat of arms of Eric Fleming and Hebla Siggesdotter Sparre, now preserved at the Cathedral Museum of Strängnäs, Sweden.
- ² Brenner 1955:95-96.
- ³ Anthoni 1970:117-118, 212; Brenner 1955:96.
- ⁴ Brenner 1955:97-98, Anthoni 1970:171.
- ⁵ Kansallinen elämäkerrasto II, vide "Fleming, Eerik Jaakki-manpoika".
- ⁶ Anthoni 1970:273-274.
- ⁷ Jutikkala & Nikander 1939:269; Brenner 1955:115-119. The coat-of-arms and the architecture of the manor have been discussed by e.g. Henrik Lindberg and Dr. Mats Åmark, see correspondence in MV:hist.top.ark.
- ⁸ Brenner 1955:107, 115.
- ⁹ Brenner 1970:109-111.
- ¹⁰ Brenner 1955:120-121.
- ¹¹ Kansallinen elämäkerrasto II, vide "Fleming, Klaus Eerikinpoika".
- ¹² See Ylikangas 1996.
- ¹³ Ylikangas 1996:338-339; Brenner 1955:126; Kansallinen elämäkerrasto II, vide "Fleming, Klaus Eerikinpoika".
- ¹⁴ Brenner 1955:127-129; Anthoni 1937:410.
- ¹⁵ Brenner 1955:132, 137-139.
- ¹⁶ Brenner 1955:143-147; Wrangel was also the likely constructor of a miniature fortress that is still found near the livestock yard.
- ¹⁷ Topographica II, Siuntio 2: Inspection 6.10.1761 (KA); Brenner 1955:149, 154-158; Kuokkanen 1981:123.
- ¹⁸ Jutikkala & Nikander 1939:268, 271.
- ¹⁹ See Jussila 1991, Köpman 1991 and Saitian kartanolinna, restaurointisuunnitelma 1991.
- ²⁰ Topographica II, Siuntio 2: Inspection 6.10.1761 (KA); Brenner 1955:156; Wrede af Elimä 1937:31-33.
- ²¹ See documents concerning Siuntio in MV:AOA.
- ²² Gaimster, pers.comm. 8.5.1998; Cotter 1992.
- ²³ Brenner 1955:111.
- ²⁴ Söderholm 1998.
- ²⁵ Spitzers 1997:147-154.
- ²⁶ Söderholm 1998.
- ²⁷ The fill contained also a few sherds of a so called Molling majolica jug, manufactured in Antwerp around 1550 (Gaimster, pers.comm. 8.5.1998), and Cologne stoneware sherds dating from ca. 1520-45.
- ²⁸ Gaimster 1997; Hurst et al.1986.

- ²⁹ Gaimster, pers.comm. 8.5.1998; Hurst et al. 1986:17-19, 23.
- ³⁰ Henkes 1994.
- ³¹ River mussel (*Unio tumidus*) and pearly freshwater mussel (*Margaritana margaritifera*) have been recognized in the material. Valovirta, pers.comm. 30.1.1998.
- ³² Lempiäinen 1997.
- ³³ Brenner 1955:127.
- ³⁴ Topographica II, Siuntio 4: 95-96 (KA).
- ³⁵ Siuntio 45a 19/1-2 (MHA).

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