

The cultural landscape during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages in the districts of Ljunits and western Herrestad — a microstudy in the project "The cultural landscape during 6000 years".

Background and aims

The research I would like to report on is part of a larger project entitled "The cultural landscape during 6000 years" (Berglund & Stjernquist 1981). The study focuses on the districts of Ljunits and Herrestad, near Ystad in southern Sweden. It is an interdisciplinary project involving 6 departments from the University of Lund and supported by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. Work began on July 1, 1982, and will continue for 6 years. The general hypothesis to be explored in the project is as follows: The development of the agrarian landscape in a long-term perspective is characterized by phases of expansion and regression, as seen from palaeogeological studies in southern Scandinavia. The causes of these phases can be looked for in changes in society ("Cultural landscape" 1983:3).

The study area

The study area is comprised of three main physiographic zones: a) a coastal landscape with sandy soils, today fully exploited for agriculture and settlement, b) an outer hummocky landscape with clayey-silty soils, currently exploited for agriculture, and c) an inner hummocky landscape with clayey or stony soils, today partly forested and less suitable for agriculture.

Subproject B3

The subproject termed B3 focuses on settlement changes during the Bronze and Iron Ages. Under the direction of Sten Tesch, head of the subproject, extensive salvage excavations by the Central Board of National Antiquities (CBNA) since 1972 have shown that the wider coastal plain to the east of Ystad was most probably a central area of continuous occupation during most of the prehistoric period (Tesch 1983, 18—19). However, because land development has not been as intense elsewhere in the study area, the situation to the west of Ystad is not as well understood, particularly for the inland zones. This western area has been the focus of my research since I joined the project one year ago (Fig. 1).

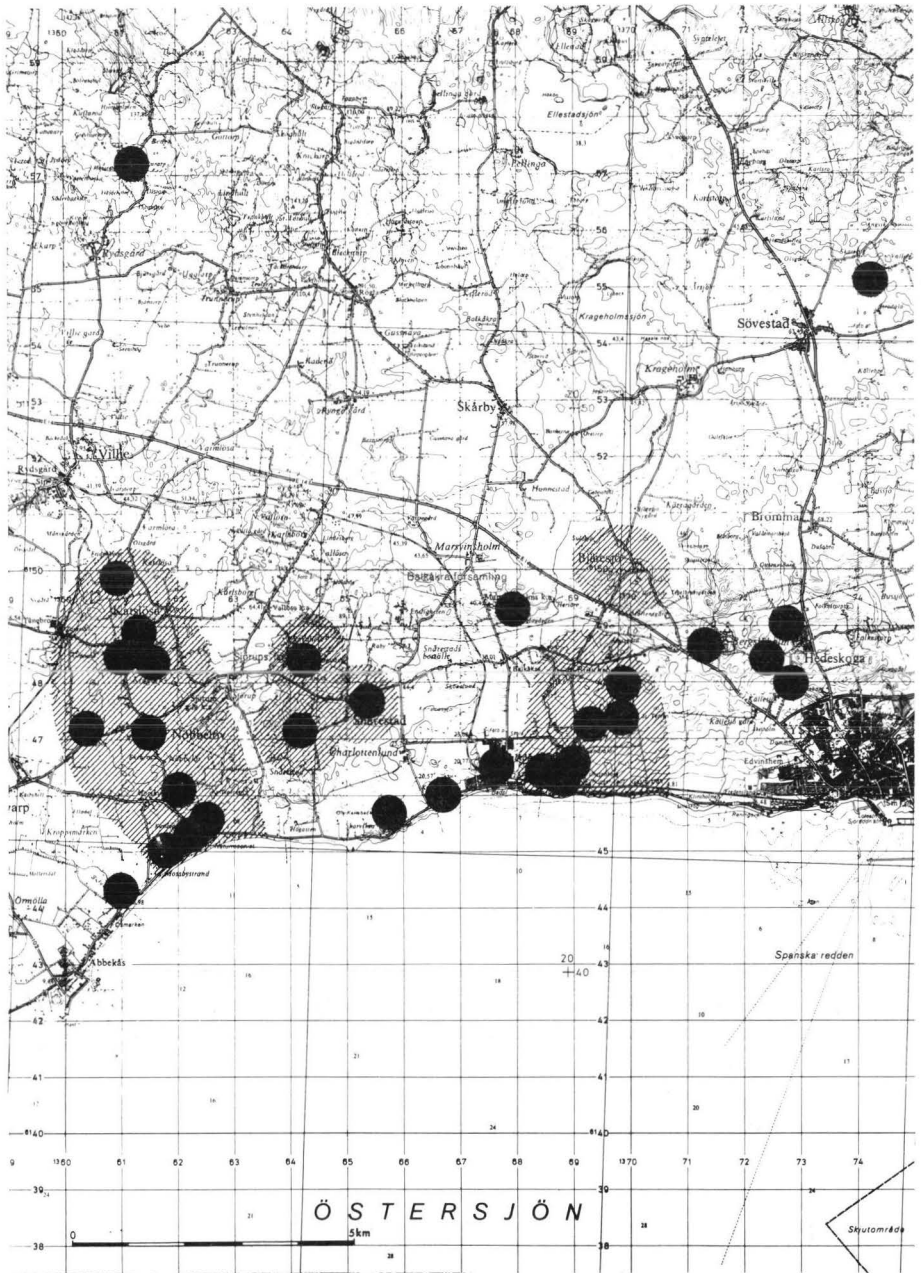


Fig. 1. A section from the Topographical Map, showing the area of investigation to the west of Ystad. The dots represent tumuli. The areas of concentrated field survey are also marked.

Models

In order to be able to attack the problem of describing how this western area was exploited by man during the Bronze and Iron Ages, I have found it helpful to set up four alternative models to test:

I. The entire area was continuously occupied from the Late Neolithic through the Early Iron Age.

If this model is true, I would expect graves, permanent settlements, and single finds dating from these periods to be found in the whole study area.

II. The coastal zone was continuously occupied, with occasional (or periodic) expeditions inland.

For this model, I would expect graves and permanent settlements in the coastal zone but not inland. Single finds and evidence of short-term/temporary settlements should be visible inland.

III. All or part of the area was colonized during periods of expansion, and settlement was abandoned during periods of regression.

Here I would expect graves and permanent settlements during those periods which pollen diagrams and water level changes have indicated were periods of expansion, and a lack of these during periods of regression.

IV. The area was never colonized during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages, and human activity occurred here only in the form of expeditions from the central areas lying to the east or to the west (Fig. 2).

The pattern to be expected here is one of dispersed and temporary settlements, no graves, and dispersed single finds. There should be little evidence of human impact in the pollen diagrams.

Methods

It is clear that in order to find out which of these models best characterizes the area, a knowledge of the location and character of primarily graves and settlements is the major concern. Unfortunately, trying to locate such features in a farmed

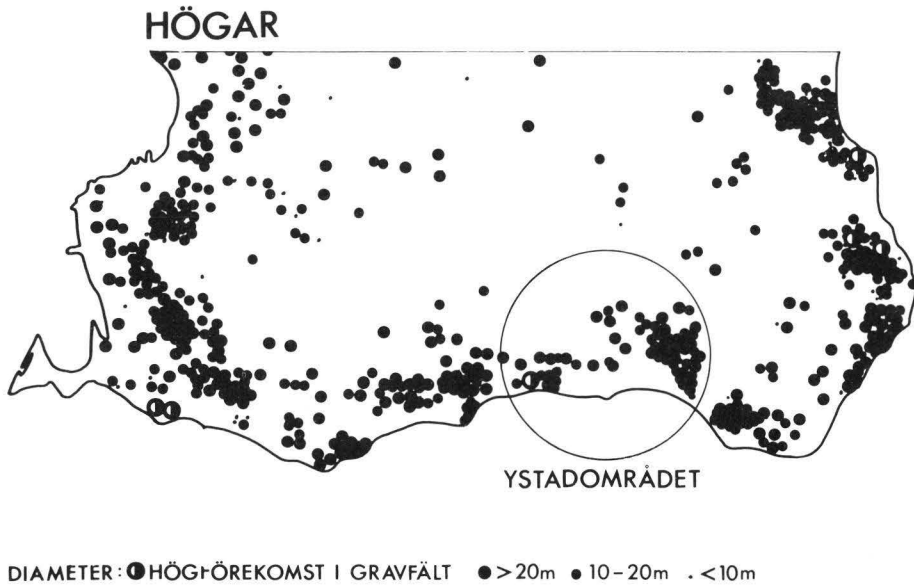


Fig. 2. Detail of the Ystad area, showing the location of tumuli (after Hyenstrand 1979 in Tesch 1983:24).

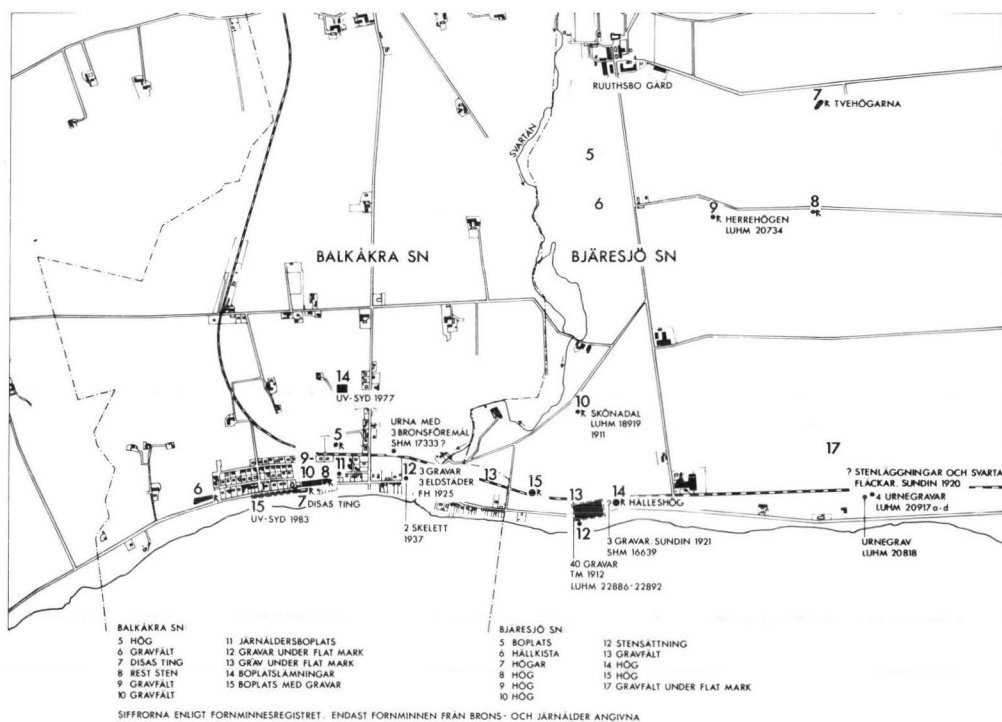


Fig. 3. A detailed map of the Svarte area, showing the location of the Svarte Cemetery as well as single finds and excavations which have taken place here since 1912.

area of this magnitude (c. 300 km²) is no easy task. Nevertheless, certain lines of evidence are available.

Study of the location of visible Bronze and Iron Age remains in the *Register of Ancient Monuments* compiled by the CBNA provides a good point of departure. Graves, in the form of Early Bronze Age tumuli and cemeteries from the Bronze and Iron Ages, are the dominant element in this area, although a few diffuse settlement sites are also registered (Fig. 1). The picture gained is one of continuous occupation mainly concentrated to the coast and along the principal waterways, in this case the Skivarp and Svarte rivers. The cemetery at the village of Svarte is the most important element in this picture (Fig. 3). Stretching 3.5 km along the coast and 300 m inland, this cemetery contains inhumation and cremation burials dating from Period IV of the Bronze Age through the Roman Iron Age. Thus far 159 Late Bronze Age burials and 58 Early Iron Age burials have been identified here. Investigation of the cemetery has been haphazard, beginning in 1912 (Hansen 1920; 1924; Vifot 1933b; 1937) and continuing sporadically up to the present with salvage excavations by the Southern Branch of the CBNA (Esping-Bodén 1977a; 1977b; Tesch 1981; Nagmér 1983). If we accept that graves indicate settlement location (Hyenstrand 1979, 28; Tesch 1983, 41; Vorting 1984, 203), then this cemetery and the tumuli which surround it are a strong indication of permanent and continuous occupation, at least at the coast, throughout the Bronze Age and into the Early Iron Age.

However, because so much of Scania's prehistory lies below the surface, other lines of evidence must also be sought when trying to locate prehistoric settlement sites. Study of older maps can provide much valuable information. In this connection the *Scanian Reconnaissance Map* ("Skånska rekognosceringskartan") (Fig. 4) from the early 1800's is particularly useful for showing the location of former wetlands prior to extensive drainage carried out in the 20th century (Emanuelsson & Bergendorff 1983; Möller 1984). Study of the *soils map* of the area, currently being revised by the Swedish Geological Survey, provides detailed information about this aspect of the natural environment. *Phosphate maps*, including Arrhenius' map covering all of Scania (Arrhenius 1934) and a more detailed map of the Balkåkra-Ruuthsbo area made by CBNA (Tesch 1982) can also yield clues about site location. Study of the modern *Economic Map* (scale 1:10 000) and the *Topographical Map* (Scale 1:50 000) provides data about present-day terrain and landuse, while older antiquarian accounts of the districts describe e.g. tumuli, hoards, etc., which may have since been lost (Bruzelius 1866; Vifot 1933a).

Museum and private collections have also been surveyed for *single finds*, which as far as possible are dated and plotted as to find location. Outstanding finds such as the bronze vessel from Bjäresjö (Montelius 1890) or the "drum" from Balkåkra (Fig. 5) (Montelius 1969) are of course rare, and as they most probably are offerings, it is questionable how much they tell us about settlement. Nevertheless they can say something about man's use of the area.

There have also been *previous archaeological excavations* in various parts of the area, particularly around Svarte (Fig. 3). In 1935, Olof Sundin and Torsten Mår-

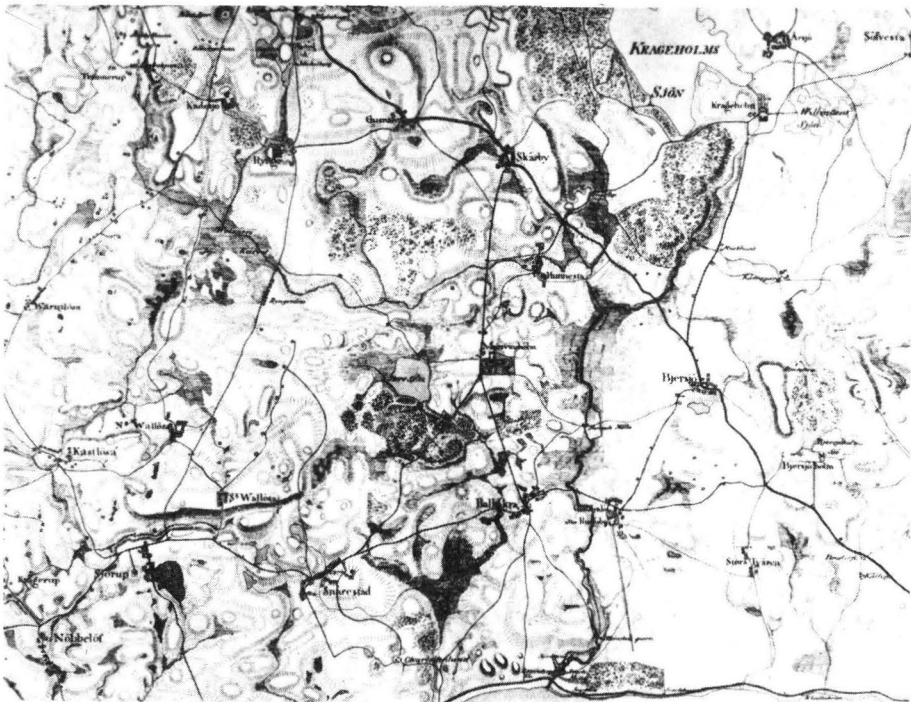


Fig. 4. A section of the Scanian reconnaissance map from the early 1800's showing i.a. the location of wetlands and mounds.

tensson of the Historical Museum in Lund reported excavating a site consisting of 15 features containing potsherds, flint, and groundstone tools dated to the Bronze Age. The site lay about 2 km from the coast on the Ruuthsbo estate (LUHM 28053). Unfortunately due to poor documentation it has not been possible to relocate the exact findspot. In addition, excavation reports from the Svarte Cemetery mention hearths and pits interspersed among the graves there (Nagmér 1983).

Field survey for locating prehistoric sites has yielded good results in the sub-projects B1 and B2 (Larsson & Larsson 1984), and has been used with success in Denmark (Jacobsen 1984; Vorting 1984) and in the Hagestad Project (Strömberg 1975). I was fortunate in being able to join the team from B1—B2 when they surveyed the most western part of the study area in the spring of 1985. In their 5 seasons of survey work they have been able to develop an effective field survey method. In addition to walking along furrows in open fields, we interviewed local farmers and recorded any finds they might have. The results yielded quite a number of possible Stone Age sites, but few indications of Bronze Age or Iron Age settlements. However, there were some signs of possible Bronze Age settlement at three spots, two in the sandy soils near the coast, and one located 4 km inland in the outer hilly landscape. All three sites are near tumuli.

We are presently underway with *excavating* these three sites. The aims of the excavations are to find out if the sites do represent settlements, to date them, and if possible to determine their size and permanency. We also hope to be able to recover evidence which will allow us to determine the subsistence base of the inhabitants, which may in turn allow us to compare coastal and inland sites.

Future work

After one year of work on the project, I would suggest that either model II or model III will best describe the use of this "marginal" western area as a whole during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages. However there is still much work to be done in the three years which remain of the project. I cannot hope to conduct field survey over the whole area, but instead I must focus my efforts on those areas which can best shed light on the models I have proposed (Fig. 1).

One objective is to try to locate the settlement(s) which the Svarte cemetery indicates should exist. For this, detailed field survey will be carried out in the area of Svarte and Ruuthsbo.

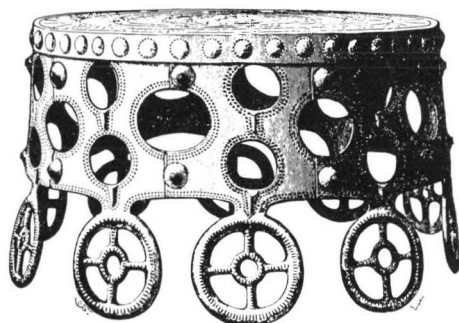


Fig. 5. The "Balkákra drum", found in a bog near Balkákra in 1847 (SHM 1461).

Secondly, it is desirable to establish the archaeological basis for the evidence for forest clearance seen in pollen diagrams from Bjärsjöholmssjön and Krageholmssjön (Berglund 1974; Gaillard 1984; Regnéll 1984). Although the area around these two locations was surveyed by B1—B2 in 1984 with negative results, I plan to conduct reconnaissance here myself in order to see if there is any evidence for Bronze and Early Iron Age settlements even inland.

A third area of interest is along the Skivarp River at the western boundary of the project area. A survey along the river will provide me with a transect of all three physiographic zones. Concentrations of tumuli toward the coast may be indicative of settlement there, while it is equally important to see if the area further inland, which lacks tumuli, also lacks settlement traces. The survey would end at the presumed tumulus at Margaretetorp, in the northwest corner of the district (Fig 1). This should be an ideal location for testing a hypothesis about colonization, and in fact this area is one on which many of the other disciplines are concentrating their efforts. By the conclusion of this research project, I hope I will be able to describe with some assurance the settlement history of both the sandy coastal zone and the clayey inland regions during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages.

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