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CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE IRON AGE SETTLEMENT OF GOTLAND

Dan Carlsson

Background

The period A.D. 400-600 was a time of change in the greater part of northern Europe (Stenberger 1955 a, Lindquist 1968, Myhre 1972, 1973, Lange 1975, Wilson 1976, Schmid 1974 and others). As far as Sweden is concerned a number of pollen diagrams from different parts of the country show an apparently similar course of development, implying a period of regression of the cultural landscape during the Migration period, and another during the 14th century (Berglund 1969, Welinder 1974, Widgren 1977, Pålsson 1977). In certain areas with a specific kind of ancient remains, mainly represented by building remains visible above ground level (stone foundations), it is considered possible to trace this decline in the using of the cultural landscape in the field material (Stenberger 1933, 1955 a, Königsson 1968, Lindquist 1968, Myhre 1972 and others).

The interpretations put forward concerning the causes of the declining using of the cultural landscape on Gotland are probably so well known that they need not be repeated. For a summary of the different interpretations the reader is referred to Stenberger 1955, Nylén 1962, Gräslund 1973 and Beskow-Sjöberg 1977.

A basic hypothesis in the discussion of the Migration period devastation is that the building remains are all from deserted farms, a kind of abandoned impoverished settlement (Almgren 1957:243, Nylén 1962:180 and others). Certain farms of course continued to exist; the rich settlements and the stone foundations within these settlements 'must have been eroded by later settlements with their need of material' (Nylén 1973:31).

The stone foundations are evidently limited in time, and, as far as I know, is no other type of building from the period A.D. 200-600 known hitherto, with the possible exception of building No. 2 at Stånga (Carlsson 1979:78). It implies, of course, that other house constructions were also used, as for instance the house remains without stone walls found in the surroundings of Skedemosse on Oland (Beskow-Sjöberg 1977). Apart from the walls, interpreted as being built of peat, these buildings do not seem to diverge from the typical stone foundations on Oland as far as construction is concerned. The newly found building remains 'are situated in an area almost free from stone foundations (Königsson, E.-S. - Königsson, L.-K. 1976:54). It means, probably, that the local building material has been used. There are no such evident gaps in the distribution of stone foundations on Gotland except, possibly, the northernmost and southernmost parts of the island (see Figure 1). This fact indicates that no agrarian settlement of extensive proportions with divergent building construction, today no longer visible, existed.

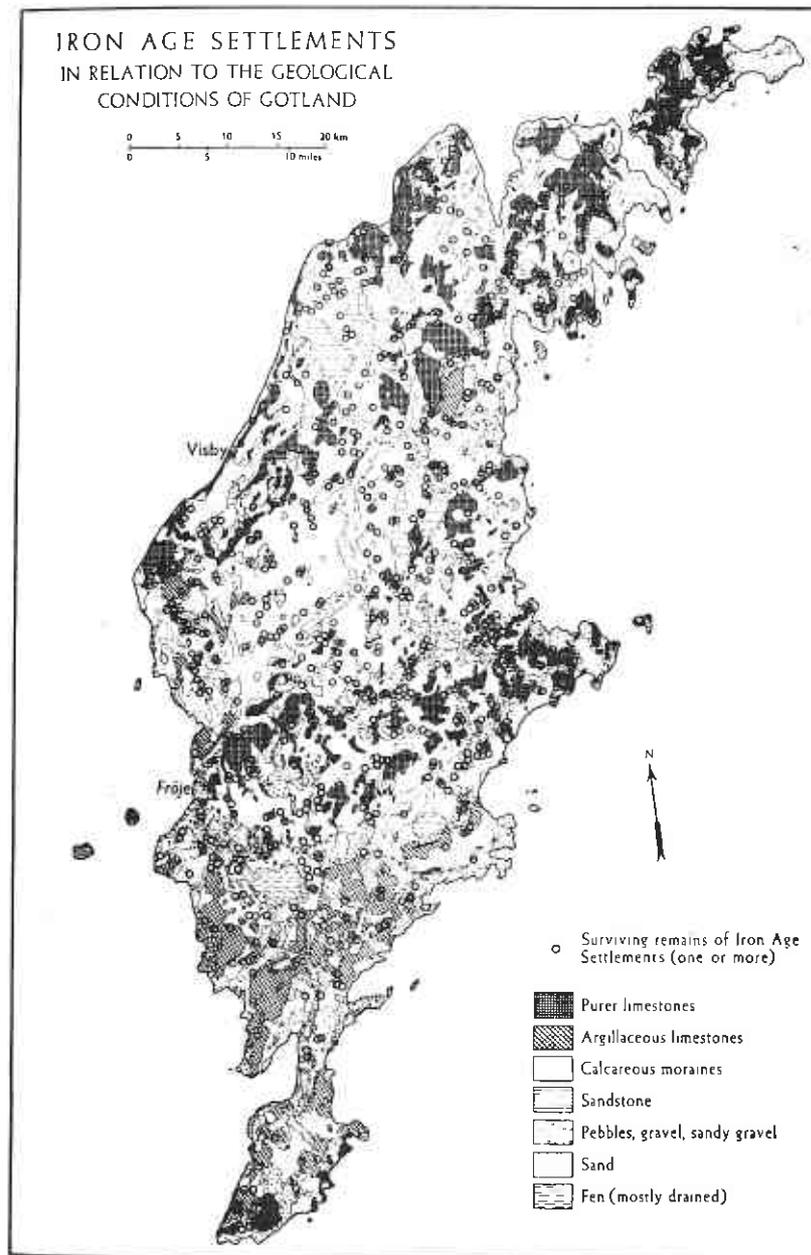
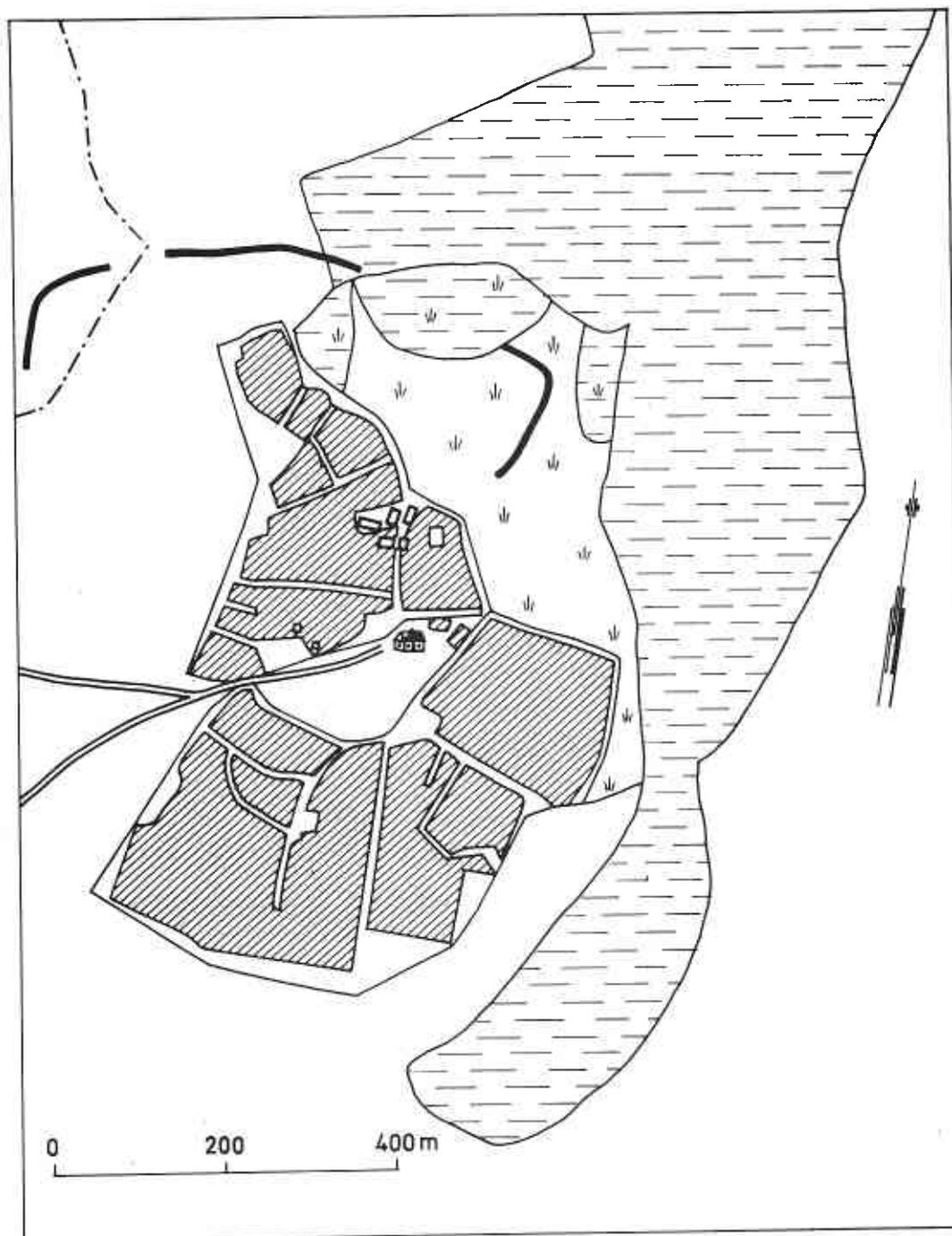


FIGURE 1: The distribution of the stone foundations on Gotland. Source, Pettersson, 1955.



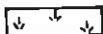
- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|--|------------------|
|  | Cultivated area |  | Stone fence |
|  | Meadow |  | Stone foundation |
|  | Marsh | | |
|  | Settlement | | |

FIGURE 2: The farmstead Krasse in the parish of Guldrupe in the year 1702, together with the other prehistoric remains.

-  Infields, 1700 AD.
-  Settlement, 1700 AD.
-  Limit infields, 500 AD.
-  Settlements, 500 AD.
-  Single burials, 500 AD.
-  Cmenteries
-  Parish border
-  Road
-  Moors

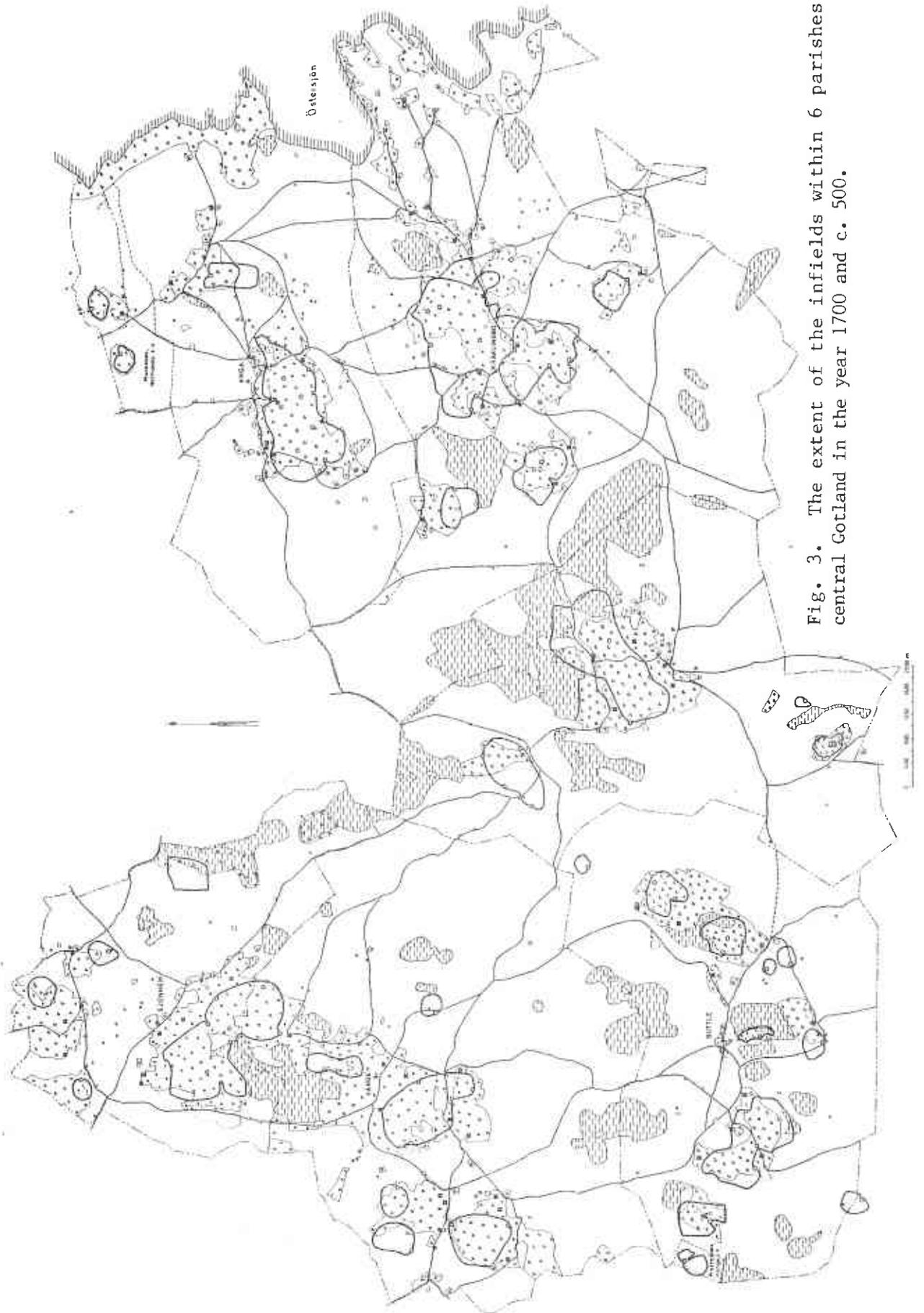


Fig. 3. The extent of the infield fields within 6 parishes in central Gotland in the year 1700 and c. 500.

The most far-reaching destruction of stone foundations has no doubt taken place in connection with the great breaking up of land for cultivation during the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The intensity of the destruction is likely to have varied greatly from one area to another. The parish of Bursle, which may be regarded as wooded district, seems to have an almost entirely intact collection of stone foundations, judging by the presence of the stone fences. The parish of När, on the other hand, which is today almost wholly brought under cultivation, shows only isolated house foundations. The presence of stone fences, among other things, indicates, however, that there were more farms with stone foundations in the parish. Let us presume that the average percentage of stone foundations destroyed by cultivation, or not registered, on the island is about 30, which figure may be an under-estimate.

It would imply that more than 2,400 house foundations once existed as the remains of a deserted impoverished settlement. The number of house foundations per farmstead in an area with well preserved prehistoric remains has been calculated to be 2.9 (Carlsson 1979:119), which means that 2,400 house foundations correspond to about 800 farms.

Then again, which part of the total settlement during the 6th century do these 800 farms represent? The general opinion is, as has been stated above, that the house foundations constitute the remains of abandoned and not re-occupied farms (Nylén 1962 and others). But is it reasonable to suggest that the preserved stone foundations, bearing in mind their number and their even distribution over the island, represent only the impoverished settlement? Some of the investigated house foundations have produced an unusually rich collection of finds. Rings in the parish of Hejnum and Stavgard in the parish of Burs can hardly be characterized as poor settlements (Biörnstad 1955). Furthermore, is it reasonable to suggest that all the stone foundations of the continuing settlement should have been eroded after a change in house construction? A comparison between the localization of the stone foundations and the cultivated fields about A.D. 1700 shows that not less than 20% of the house foundations are to be found within the cultivated field area (Carlsson 1977:36). The cultivated fields in the year 1700 are, to a large extent, still cultivated today, and, in spite of the long period of cultivation, a large number of house foundations remain as obstructions in the fields. Stone foundations have also been preserved in direct contact with the recent settlements (Figure 2).

However, there has been, so far as can be judged, a certain reduction in the number of farms during the end of the Migration period and the beginning of the Vendel period, which can be seen in the pollen diagrams (Pålsson 1977). It is, of course, very difficult to judge the extent of the abandonment. But let us, for the sake of simplicity, suggest that it has been of the same dimensions as the 14th century abandonment on Gotland which implies a reduction of the number of farms by about 10% (Ersson 1974:97). Following the prevailing interpretation of desertion, a tenth of the Migration Period settlements would thus include about 800 farms. The total amount of farms on Gotland about the year 500, would, according to these calculations, be about 8,000. It may be compared with the number of farms during the 13th century, which Ersson (1974:98) estimates at about 1,500. About the year 1700 there were 1,325 taxable farms on Gotland (Moberg 1939:23). It is worth remarking that the 13th century was probably the period during historical times that had the largest number of farms. Even if calculating upon a 50% desertion of farms during the Migration Period, which seems incredible in itself, the equation will be unsolvable. The

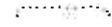
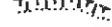
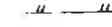
numbers are of course uncertain, but still they point at the absurdity that the house foundations that can be observed in the open only represent the deserted 'poor settlements' of the period. It would seem to be clear that the surviving house foundations, including the estimated 30% that have been eroded by cultivation, or that have not been recorded, represent the total number of settlements from the period in question. This means that both deserted farmsteads and farms which continued to exist, are included in the recorded material on house foundations. In other words, a large number of the Early Iron Age farms observable in the open did survive the crisis during the Migration Period - early Vendel Period and continued to exist after that albeit in other forms. The fact that such a large number of the foundations have been preserved, also in close contact with the recent settlements, is certainly due to the construction of the stone foundations, which meant that the new buildings were seldom placed on the old foundations. In consequence, the succeeding houses were, as a rule, built at a greater or lesser distance from the earlier stone foundations.

The Cultural Landscape about 500 - the Cultural Landscape 1700. A Comparison.

When comparing the extension of the cultural landscape about A.D. 1700 with the 6th century landscape, as it shows itself by the surviving stone foundations and the stone fences, one may notice an apparent congruency in the extension of the agrarian cultural landscape at the two dates (Figure 3). The 6th century infields almost completely correspond to those of the year 1700. The same is true of the number of settlements at the two different dates. About the year 500 the number of settlements within the area of investigation may be estimated at 75. The corresponding number in the year 1700 is 72. As the number of settlements in the year 1700, probably corresponds to a great extent to the number of settlements during the Late Iron Age, one may suggest that about 80% of the stone foundation settlements within the area of investigation continue in the historical farms. This means that the Early Iron Age settlement and the historical settlement is one and the same cultivation unit. On the other hand, it is not necessarily true that the buildings from the 7th century and onwards have always been located on one and the same site (that of the historical farm). This has been shown by, for instance, the investigation at Burge in the parish of Lummelunda (Thunmark 1979).

Conclusive records of continuity between Early Iron Age farms and historical farms could be provided by excavations on the building sites of the historical farms with a view to finding their origin. This is of course a very awkward undertaking, bearing in mind the erosion and disturbance of older cultural layers that has certainly occurred in continuously used sites. It would be simpler to do the equivalent investigations on a deserted farm site, where it is possible, by means of cadastral material, to prove that the buildings have been moved, or that the settlement has been deserted at an early date. Within the area of investigation there are in the first place two possible objects of investigation. One is Ungelhem in the parish of Buttle (A) and the other is Fjäle in the parish of Ala (B) (see Figure 3). Adjoining the two stone foundation settlements are remains probably dating from the Late Iron Age and the Middle Ages, which fact very likely implies that the stone foundation farm existed, though in a changed form, into the Middle Ages. If this suggestion is correct, the settlements survived the critical period during the 6th century, but were deserted during the 14th century agrarian crisis.

Fig. 4 omitted.

-  Field-wall, line indicating top of the wall
-  Stone fence
-  Edge of cultivated field
-  Terrace
-  Edge of hill
-  Posthole building
-  Building on a stonework foot
-  Stone foundation
-  Post-hole
-  Boundary between properties
-  Clearings cairn
-  Waterhole
-  Marsh
-  Area with more than 100p°

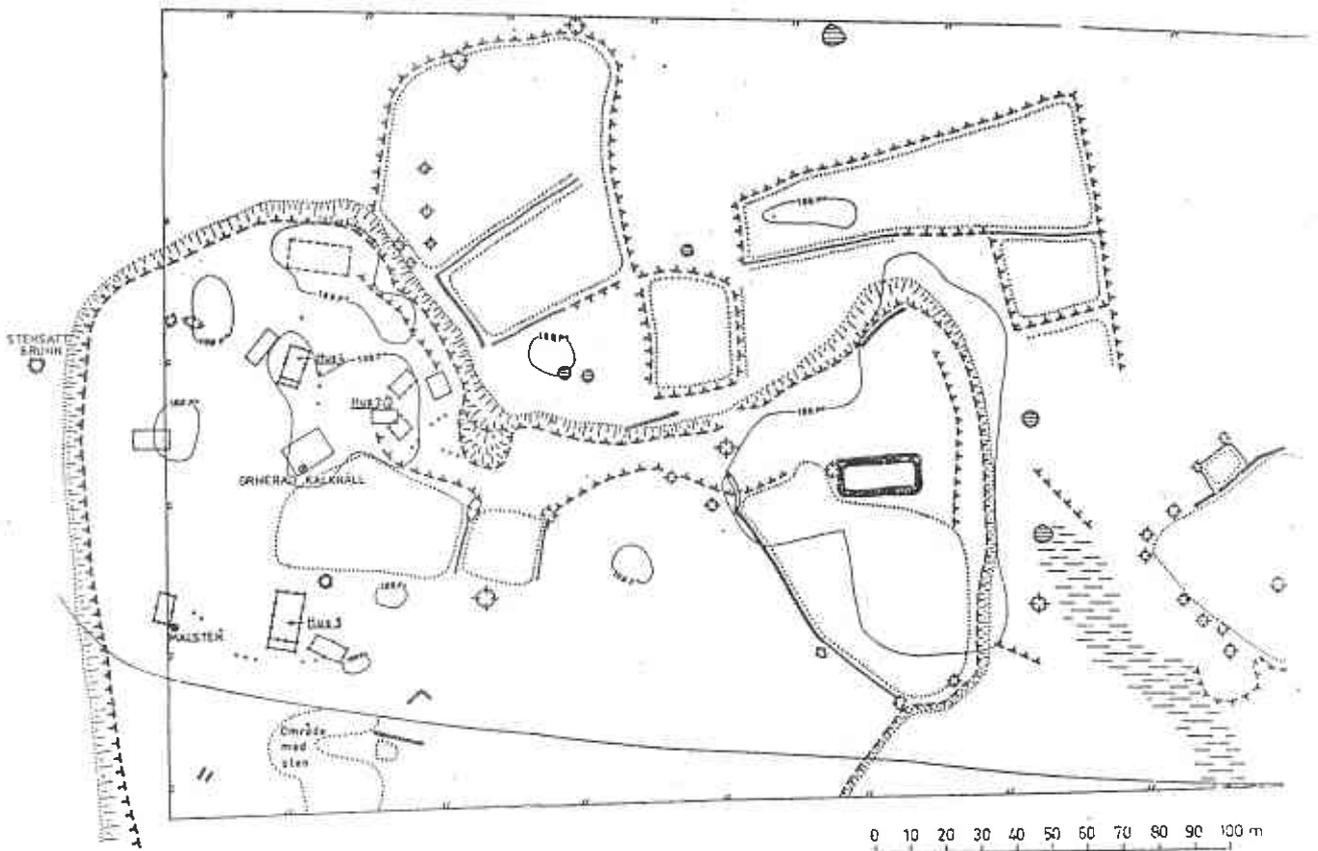


FIGURE 5: The fossilized cultural landscape connecting on to the settlement remains.

I chose to investigate Fjäle, for two specific reasons. In the first place the area has never, as far as can be judged, been cultivated after the desertion. Secondly, it was possible to distinguish the building remains of the Fjäle farmstead at an early date (Figure 5).

The deserted farm Fjäle

The investigations were intended to try to demonstrate continuity of settlement between the stone foundations on the eastern part of the plateau and the other building remains to the west (Figure 4, 5). On the basis of the general dating of the stone foundations to about A.D. 200-600, the suggestion was made that the western building remains had their origin in the early Vendel period. The excavations were limited to one summer season as a consequence of scanty resources of time and money.

The building remains within the western site were of two types - on the one hand there were low stone foundations of about 0.5 m limestone slabs just discernible on the surface, on the other there were rows of postholes where some of the supporting stones were visible. The first construction was interpreted as the foundations for 'bulhus' (see for instance Bohrn 1942). The posthole buildings were suggested to be older, bearing in mind that such houses are known from the Viking period (Thunmark 1976). Probably the last mentioned house construction is the form of building succeeding stone foundations. Considering this, three, on the surface clearly defined, posthole buildings were chosen for investigation. One of the posthole houses was overlapped by a 'bulhus' foundation, which fact was clear already before the excavation. In order to minimize the area of excavation the investigations were made in a separate coordinate system for each house construction. Finds and constructions were registered per square meter, and were levelled and registered on a plan on the scale of 1:20. Bones, charcoal (except concentrations of charcoal) and burnt clay were gathered per square meter and layer. Each layer was photographed from above and from the side in colour and black and white.

A total of about 1000 finds were registered. Only that part of the find material that may be used for dating will be considered here.

Buildings 2 and 3

Before the removal of the turf there were visible a number of postholes on the surface, which when connected, formed a 8 x 6 meter rectangle (building 2). In the northern corner the construction was overlapped by a stone foundation, just visible in the grass (building 3).

Directly under the turf lay a dark, 0.15 - 0.25 m thick, cultural layer, lying directly on the limestone bedrock. The cultural layer was excavated in two strata. Within the investigated area were found more than 800 finds. Furthermore there was plenty of bone and charcoal. Besides the two clearly distinguishable house foundations there were more postholes, probably older than the two houses (Figure 6). Below follows a description of the different constructions (Figure 7).

On top is building 3, about 7 x 5 meters, with its long axis orientated NNW-SSE. The foundations consisted of a stonework footing made up of 0.2-0.8 m long and 0.1 m thick limestone slabs. The NE long side of the house

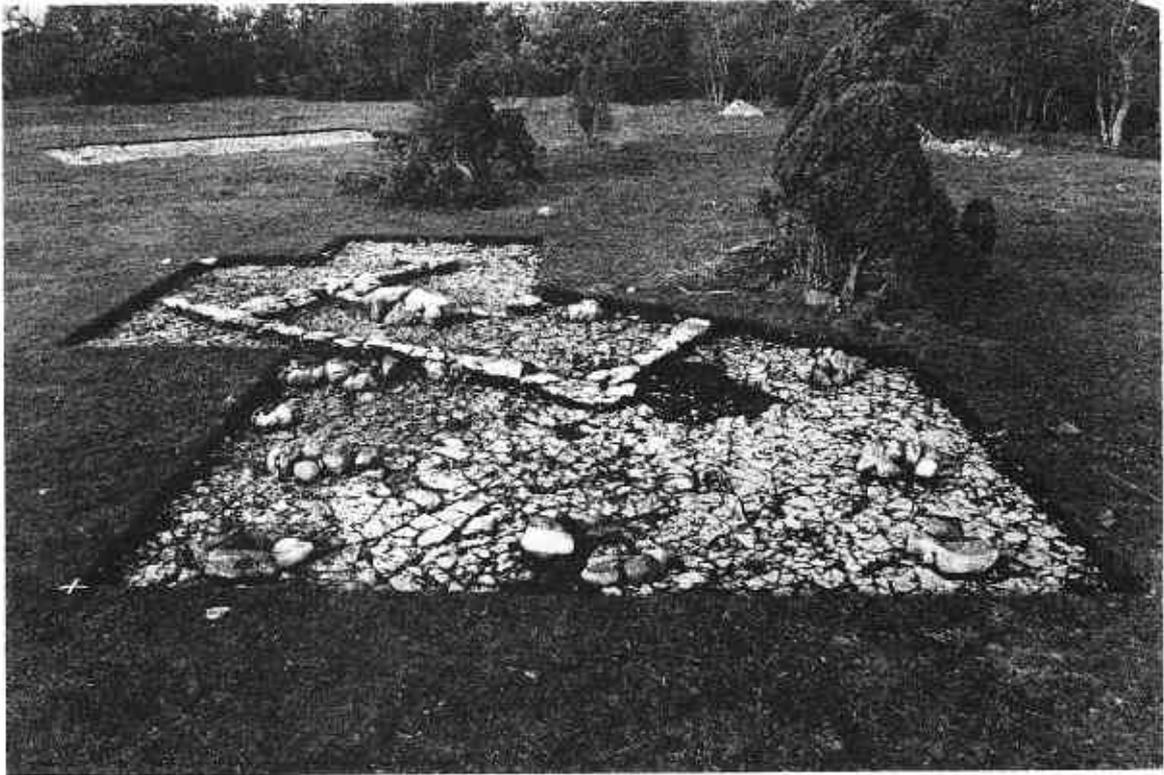


FIGURE 6: Buildings 2 and 3. In the background building 4. Photo, author.

was completely missing, and no traces of it whatsoever were found. In the western corner there was a hearth about 2.5 x 2.2 m, which contained plenty of burnt clay and 0.2-0.3 m long stones. This building was probably used as a dwelling-house. In favour of this interpretation there is not only the hearth but also the many finds, including a rich deposit of bone material. Besides a large number of iron and pottery finds there were also found three very worn silver coins dating from the late 12th or the early 13th century. By means of the pottery the house can be dated to about 1200-1350. In close connection with the NW short side of the building a ground sill was found, lying parallel to the wall. The sill is therefore likely to belong to the building. A C14 sample gave the result A.D. 1055 ±90 (all the C14-samples are corrected according to Damon et al. 1974).

Building 2 measured about 8 x 6 meters. Its long axis is orientated in the NNE-SSW. On both long sides stood four posts and in each gable there was a central post, which probably carried the roof-tree. Between the two western postholes in the northern gable were, for at least a meter length, limestone slabs placed in a row, which probably made up the bedding for a sill log. It is, of course, difficult to say why just this part of the wall was provided with a stone foundation, but it is possible that it indicates an entrance. Three C14 samples of wood from two different postholes gave the following dates: A.D. 1155 ±90, A.D. 1105 ±90 and A.D. 1190±90 respectively.

Unburnt wood was in all the postholes. These samples have been examined by Thomas Bartholin in Lund, and turned out to be exclusively pine. This is also true for buildings 4 and 5. As the posts were unburnt, there was no risk of confusion with the charcoal that was found scattered here and there in all the buildings. Thereby the C14 datings in all probability do refer to the posts.

The function of the building is uncertain, but the find material, including among other things pottery and plenty of bones, indicates that it was probably a dwellinghouse. There was no clearly defined hearth. On the other hand, parts of the building contained plenty of charcoal, and in the bedrock could be seen a 2.0x1.5 m wide and 0.1-0.2 m deep pit, which may be interpreted as a hearth. The cultural layer on the bottom of the pit had a similar composition to the rest. The pit is older than building 3, which is shown by the fact that the pit is overlapped by the eastern short side of that house.

A still older phase in the construction could be discerned. It consisted of isolated minor postholes together with a thin cultural layer, which could be seen for instance under the sill stones between two posts in the northern short side of building 2 (see Figure 7).

On the basis of the slight thickness of the cultural layer and its homogenous character, it is very difficult to separate the finds from the different buildings. Within the excavated area it is in building 3 that the largest number of finds, including bones, was found. But the distribution of the finds is rather uniform over the whole area, also outside the buildings, with the exception of the southwestern corner of the excavated area (Figure 8). The cultural layer was at its thickest in the southeastern part of the area, and here also were found two of the objects that may date from the Vendel period. The first is a 2.8 centimeter long miniature bronze sword. It has a striking resemblance to the miniature swords from Eketorp, which have been dated to the early Vendel period by Näsman (1973) (Figure 9). The second object is a yellow, half transparent, glass bead of the same type

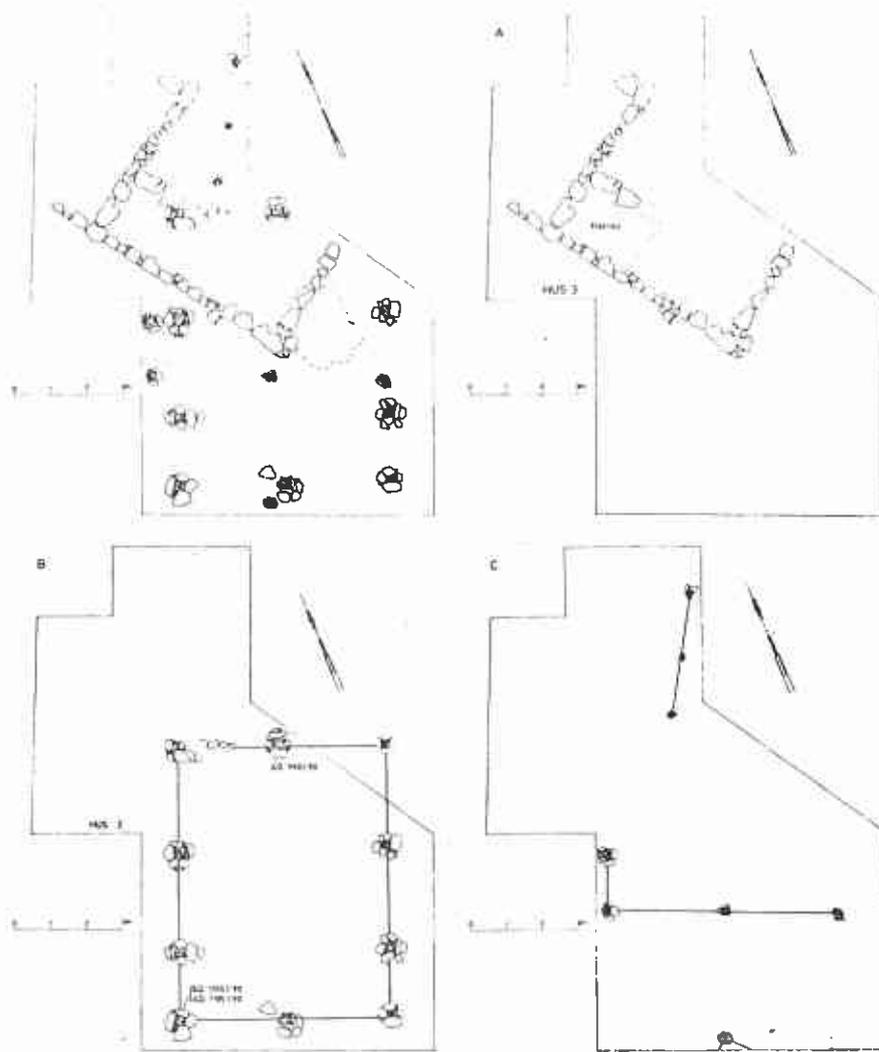


FIGURE 7: Buildings 2(B) and 3(A). Probably older than buildings 2 and 3 are a number of smaller postholes (C).



FIGURE 8: Buildings 2 and 3. The distribution of the finds in situ.

as Nerman 1969, Figure II, Taf. III, which has been dated to the period VII:1, that is 550-600 (Figure 10). The third object that may date from the Vendel period is a fragment of a red, probably conical, glass paste bead.

Several objects probably date from the Viking period, probably its later part. Among these is a bronze ring brooch, a square bronze button with rune-stone style ornament (possibly from the transition to the Middle Ages) and a filigree-worked silver bead (Figure 10).

It can be pointed out that some of the finds are earlier than the C14 dating of the posthole building. This can probably be explained by the fact that the dating of the posts does not give the date of construction of the building. Posts dug down into the ground probably had a rather limited lifetime. This meant that they were occasionally replaced (Thunmark 1976:131). At Fjåle all the excavated postholes contained charcoal, bones, or stray iron objects like nails, rods and horseshoe-nails. These finds will have ended up in the postholes in connection with the repairing and exchange of posts.

It is obvious from the dating of the two buildings that the time gap between them was very short. That building 3 overlaps building 2 is also clear from the fact that the northwestern posthole of the second building was found below the hearth of the first building. Building 2 was probably constructed in the Viking period, provided the Viking period finds really are associated with the building.

Building 4

The building measures 10.5 x 5.5 meters, its long axis orientated NE-SW. A number of postholes could be discerned on the surface before the excavation. The cultural layer was apparently thin and was rarely more than 0.15 m thick. There were no inner constructions in the building except for a small heap of limestone overlapping the eastern part of the southern short side. The heap contained scattered bones. The dimensions of the postholes varied in different parts of the building (Figure 11). The heaviest posts, with a diameter of 0.2-0.3 m, stood at the corners and along the long sides. In the middle of the two long sides were two posts placed close together. The northern most two of each pair were made up of stones placed on edge. The other two were much simpler as far as construction is concerned. Besides these postholes there were on the southern long side two additional postholes, probably indicating an entrance. Close inside the entrance there was a layer of hard packed clay over an area of about 2 x 1 m.

Parallel to the northern long side, in direct connection with the two closely placed posts, unburnt wooden fragments were found over an area of about 0.2 x 1.5 m. These fragments were probably the remains of a sill log.

Wooden fragments from 6 posts in all have been C14 dated. The spread of dates is worth noticing (A.D. 695 \pm 120, A.D. 865 \pm 90, A.D. 940 \pm 90, A.D. 970 \pm 90, A.D. 1140 \pm 105 and A.D. 1360 \pm 155 respectively). The great spread in the C14 datings is probably a result of the replacement of rotten posts. The C14 dates indicate that the building was used into the early Middle Ages. A plausible starting-point for the building is represented by the C14 date of A.D. 695.

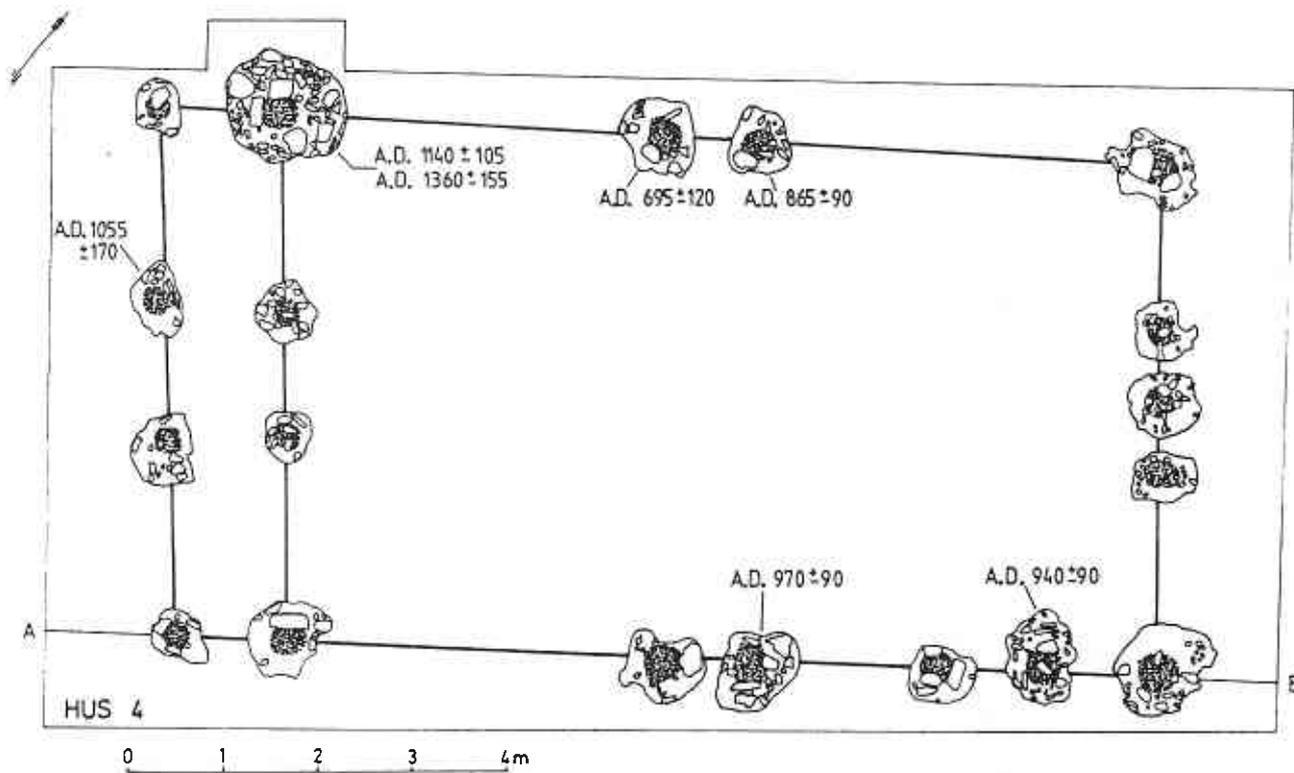


FIGURE 11: Building 4. Plan.

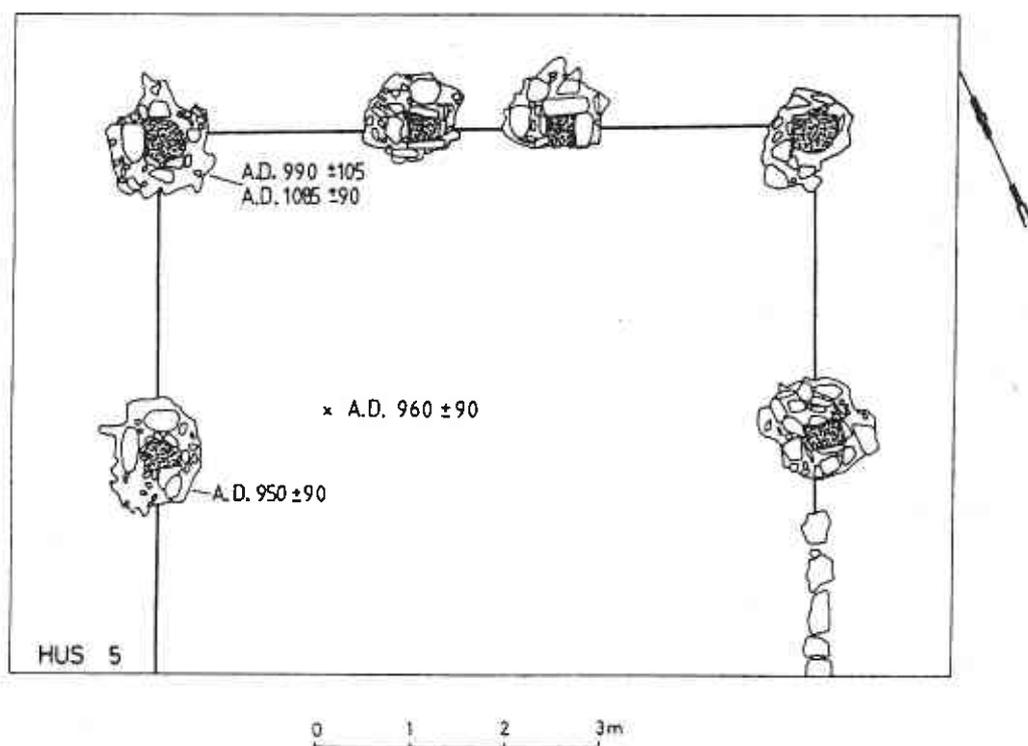


FIGURE 13: Building 5. Plan.

The find material in building 4 was quite uniform, and consisted mainly of various kinds of iron objects. Among other things were found a lot of iron arrow-heads. Pottery was completely absent except for one glazed potsherd dating from the 13th century. The larger part of the datable find material is from the Viking period. It includes among other things a bronze needle-case, a heart-shaped belt mounting of silver inlaid in niello technique, belt and strap-end mountings of bronze and silver, and a few beads (Figure 12).

Probably of older date is a fragment of a spiral ornamented bracelet of bronze. The object has been worn on one side, which indicates its use as a bracelet. It most resembles Figures 1533, 1535, in Nerman 1969, which, in time, means A.D. 650-700.

A probable date for the construction of the building is, on the basis of the C14 datings, the middle of the Vendel period. This dating is confirmed by the probably Vendel period bracelet. The evidence may seem weak, with only one find from the Vendel period. However, from a general point of view, it is the case that from the earliest phases of a settlement there are very few objects left to recover. I would call attention to the distribution of datable objects at Vallhagar, where 50 artifacts have been assigned to the Migration period and only 7 to the Roman Iron Age (Stenberger 1955 b: 1146). Also characteristic are Beskow-Sjöberg's (1977) house investigations on Oland. She sums up the results of the investigations of two houses at Sorby Tall as follows: 'The table shows that the C14-dates stretch from the 2nd to the 7th century A.D. Datable finds appear only in the second half of the period, so that the settlement would be dated to be Migration and Vendel periods on the evidence of the objects alone. The C14 dates imply, however, that it was occupied earlier' (Beskow-Sjöberg 1977: 123).

A continuous settlement means, for natural reasons, that older remains are all the more destroyed. The result of this is the almost complete absence of artifacts from the oldest phases of a settlement. When excavating settlements, therefore, C14-analyses are necessary for the dating of the beginning of the settlement.

Building 5

The building was clearly outlined before the removal of the turf by a number of postholes. The size of the building was estimated at about 15x7 meters. The house, excavated only in its northern third, has a certain resemblance to building 4, for instance in the construction of the postholes and in the gables having two posts rather close to each other (Figure 13). Between three postholes along the eastern long side (partly outside the excavated area) there was a row of limestone blocks, very probably the foundations of a sill log. As in building 4 the southern (un-excavated) gable had some kind of extension.

The find material was very poor, and consisted mainly of, besides bones, minor iron and bronze objects. Two of them may be given an approximate dating. One is a silver pendant in the shape of a flower, probably dating to the early Middle Ages. A similar pendant of bronze was found in building 2/3. The second object is a green glass-paste bead, common in the early Vendel period (Nerman 1969, Taf. III and IV).

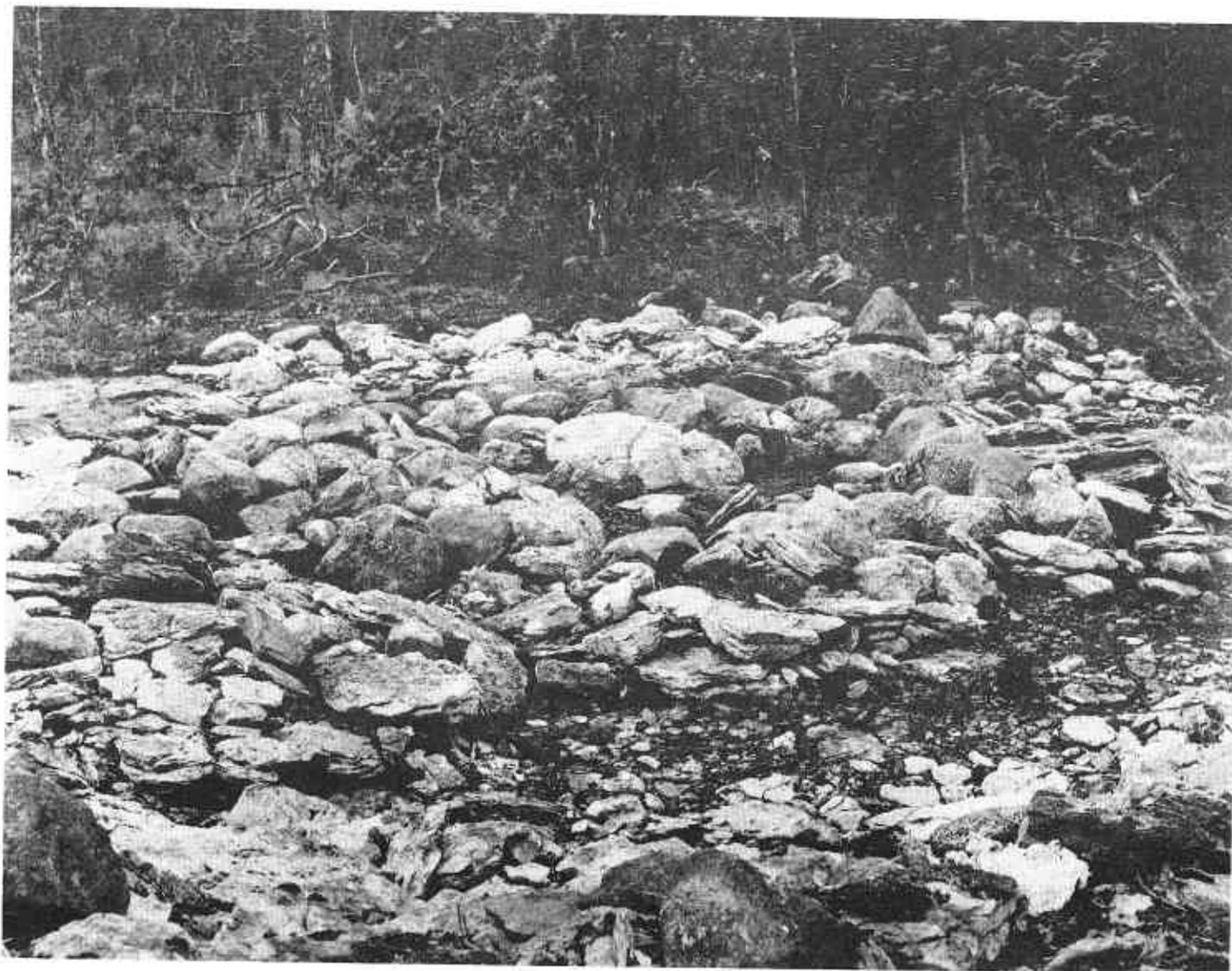


FIGURE 14: Grave 17. Photo author.



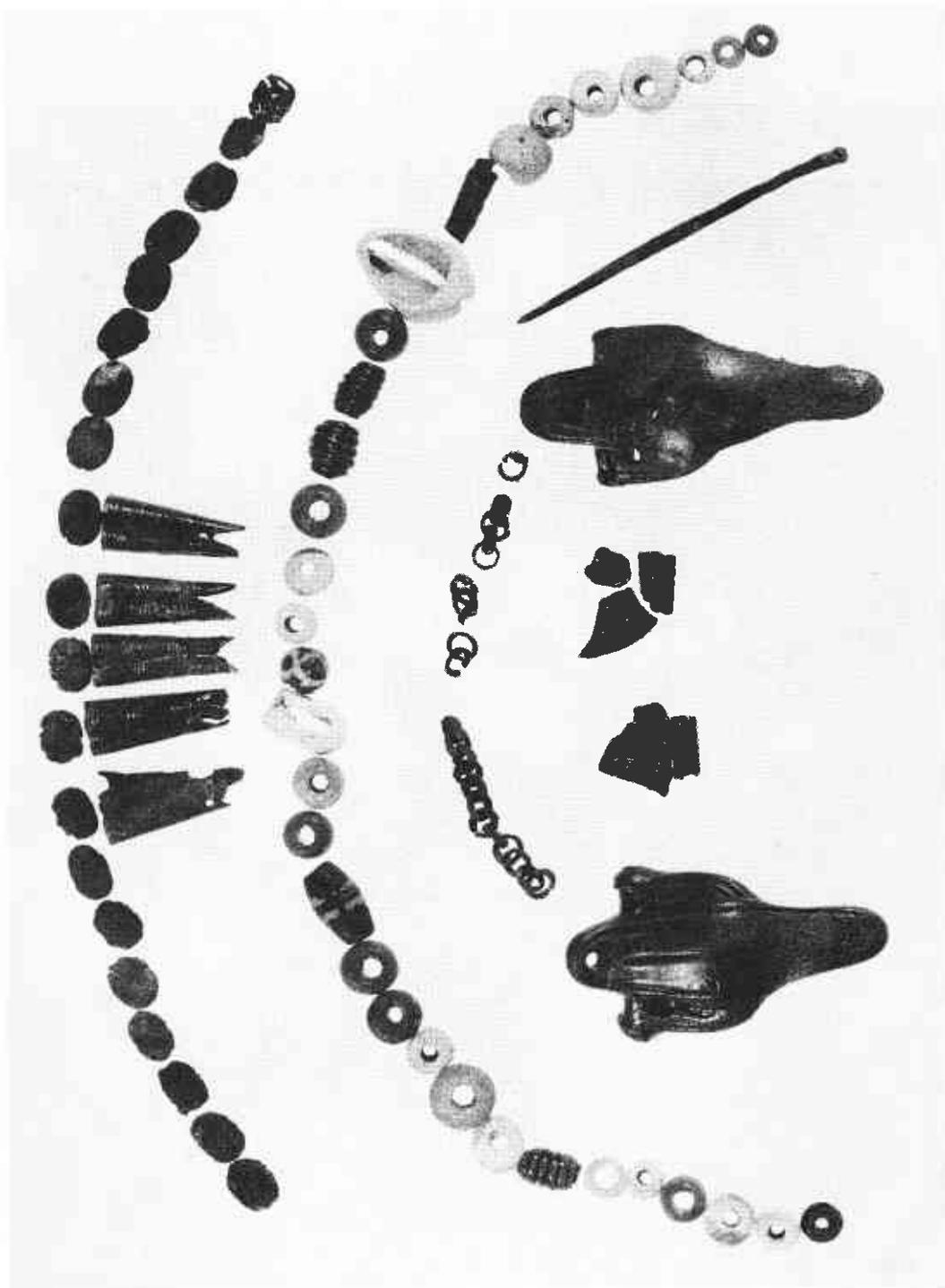


FIGURE 15: Grave 17. The artifacts. Photo L. Lindqvist.

In the north-eastern part of the building, over an area of 2 x 1 meters, was a great amount of charred grains of corn, almost exclusively barley. The building was probably used as a storehouse, and the presence of charred grain indicates that it was burnt down. This theory is confirmed by the fact that the upper part of the posts were charred, while the wood further down had not been touched by fire. Four C14 analyses have been made; two from the same post, A.D. 1085 \pm 90 and A.D. 990 \pm 105 respectively, one from another post, A.D. 950 \pm 90, and one from an unburnt concentration of wood in the north-western part of the building, A.D. 960 \pm 90. The life of the building is uncertain, but it probably existed during the second half of the Viking period and also a little into the Middle Ages.

Grave No. 17

About 300 meters south of the settlement, in connection with the parish boundary, there were three grave-fields of altogether about 40 graves. Besides the grave-fields there are 2 graves to the west of the settlement in close contact with the road connecting Fjåle with Visnar ångar in the south, Hexarve in the parish of Buttle in the west, and the settlement in the central part of the parish of Ala in the north. The grave-fields are situated directly on the bedrock. It stretches kilometers to the south, west and east. The grave-fields are therefore in all probability connected with the Fjåle settlement.

It is probable that the graves should not be assigned to the stone foundations, bearing in mind that graves, dating from the same period as the stone foundations are generally almost invisible above ground level (Nerman 1935:31, 102). There is a distinction between the grave-fields as regards the stone material. The grave-field situated furthest in the east contains a lot more stone-lined limestone than the other two. The stone lined graves were round, or nearly round, invisible except for a slight indication of a dry-stone wall. Some of the graves in the northernmost grave-fields are cairn-like. The absence of constructional details and the many limestone blocks indicate a date in the Late Iron Age, and it is probable that the inhabitants of the posthole houses were buried here.

If the suggestion that the settlement on the western part of the plateau dates back to the 7th century, and that the grave-fields are connected to Fjåle, is correct, it implies that we will find here graves from the 7th century and onwards. Trying to show that the 7th century actually was represented in the graves, one of those in the eastern grave-field was chosen for excavation. The choice was made bearing in mind that these graves, even if badly damaged are reminiscent of the dry-stone walled graves at the Trullhalsar grave-field in the parish of Anga, which date back to the early Vendel period (Nerman 1969).

The eastern grave-field contains about 20 graves, which represents half the number of graves. The excavated grave (No. 17), like other graves, had been robbed. The grave had a diameter of about 5 meters, and was 0.3 meters high (Fig. 14). The stones were mainly grey stones measured 0.2-0.4 meters. The grave was surrounded by a ruined dry-stone wall of limestone slabs measuring 0.2-0.6 meters. The central part was broken open and badly damaged.

Below a single-layer stone filling were found the remains of an unburnt skeleton, lying directly on the rock. Only parts of the legs and the feet were found in their original position. The remaining parts of the skeleton

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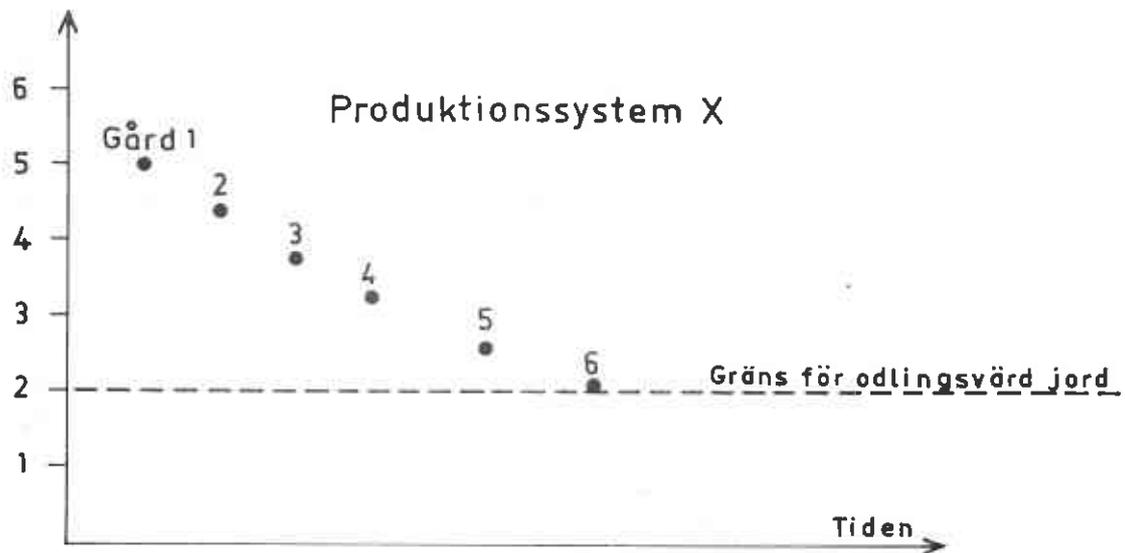


FIGURE 16: The diagram shows how the establishment of new settlements, within the existing system of cultivation in course of time takes place on the poorer land from an agricultural point of view.

Number of
settlements

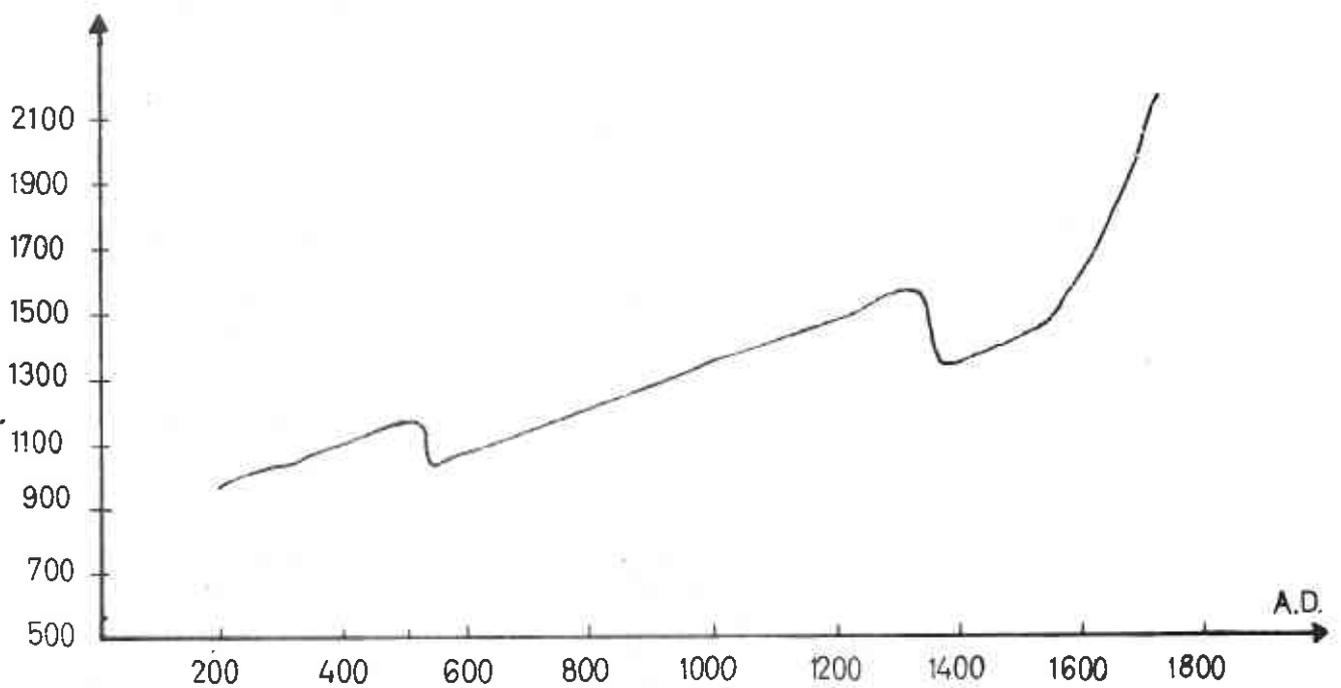


FIGURE 17: An interpretation of the development of settlement on Gotland in the period A.D. 200-1700.

lay scattered in the grave.

The position of the surviving bones and the finds shows that the corpse had been lying on her right side with the head to the north and with slightly flexed knees. In view of the fragmentary condition of the skeleton an osteological classification is very difficult, but it is probably that of a woman which is not contradicted by the finds.

The finds were, in spite of the robbing, quite numerous, and consisted of the following artifacts: two bronze brooches in the form of animal heads; parts of a necklace consisting of 13 glass paste beads, 13 limestone beads, 4 bronze beads, 2 shells, 5 fishhead-shaped pendants and 20 bottom plates of fishhead-shaped pendants (Fig. 15). Fragments of a bronze chain and fragments of two bronze bracteates were also found. The finds date the grave between A.D. 600 and 700.

Summary

The aim of the investigations was to try to prove continuity between the stone foundations and the other settlement remains. The stone foundations were suggested to have existed during the period that is the prevailing dating of house constructions of that kind - A.D. 200-600. The suggestion was that the settlement to the west was established about 600. The results of the investigations may be summed up as follows: The settlement in the western part of the plateau lasted up to the middle of the 14th century. We can trace the settlement back into the Viking period. The dating of building 4, together with the presence of a number of objects probably dating from the early Vendel period, indicates a settlement dating from the 7th century onwards. To this we may add a grave of the 7th century in one of the three grave-fields, which no doubt should be connected with the Fjäle settlement.

The dating of the oldest settlement is uncertain, and no definitely Vendel period buildings were found (with the possible exception of building 4), even though they probably existed. Why were no Vendel period buildings found? The main reasons are two. On the one hand, only a very small part of the settlement area has been excavated; and on the other, it is the clearest and best preserved and therefore the most recent post-hole buildings that have been investigated. A 600-year-long settlement naturally destroys its oldest features. I should instead have excavated constructions with very diffuse post-holes. The localization of these houses may be, in the first place, the area south-east of building 2/3 and the area between building 4 and building 2/3. The second area has a very high phosphate content (Fig. 5). In spite of choosing the wrong buildings to get an answer to the problem, a number of objects were found probably dating from the Vendel period.

Most facts speak in favour of the Medieval settlement having its origins at the beginning of the Vendel period, and constituting the continuation of the stone foundation farm. The Fjäle settlement is one of the peripheral single farmsteads, which, being well situated and long established in comparison with the central settlements, runs the greatest risk of desertion at critical phases in the agrarian development. If there is a connection between the stone foundation settlement and the historical farm at Fjäle, it is reasonable to suggest that the probability of continuity is greater in the central settlements.

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