

Cultural Diversity in Present-day Scania and Blekinge ca. AD 800–1000

BY FREDRIK SVANBERG

Abstract

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The main point expressed in the article is that differences between different regions in present-day southern Sweden during the Viking Age, primarily of a cultural and social nature, have not hitherto been understood or emphasized enough. Such differences are a main focus of interest when the great historical questions of this period are evaluated. The author argues that it is possible to characterize human collectives by studying cultural traditions reflected in the archaeological material. Such collectives can be a basis for discussions of Viking Age society and historical change. The main inspiration is earlier research by Johan Callmer, which can be made more detailed and theoretically elaborated. Cultural diversity in present-day Scania and Blekinge is discussed, primarily based on differing burial customs and cultural contacts. As a result, four major groups, and several minor ones are discussed briefly.

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Introduction

Some aspects of culture and society were similar over large parts of Scandinavia during the Viking Age. There were great similarities in ideas as regards the world of metaphors. For example, common myths seems to be expressed in Gotlandic picture stones, skaldic poetry and some burial rituals represented in many areas (Andrén 1993). The social élites of different areas shared some cultural traits. Characteristic artefacts, such as the oval brooches, were spread over vast territories. On the other hand, there were differences between large groups of people in terms of cultural traditions, social structures, economic strategies, centre–periphery relations and participation in networks of trade and exchange.

How important were such differences and

how should they be characterized? What terminology should be used? How can they be seen in relation to early mentions of names of “peoples” and “lands” in the written sources? Can the archaeological material illuminate how such names should be understood or vice versa?

In Swedish research into present-day southern Sweden, some efforts have been made to discuss differences between large areas (Hyenstrand 1984, 1996; Burström 1991; Callmer 1991, 1992, 1994). In Danish research into present-day southern Sweden, mostly concerned with the medieval Danish provinces of Scania, Blekinge and Halland, less interest has been devoted to the question of regional differences or the characterization of different human collectives (Randsborg 1980; Roesdahl 1982; Sawyer 1988).

The research of Johan Callmer is of special significance in this context, especially his important mapping of different settlement areas, a splendid tool for further discussions of different regions on a general level (Callmer 1991). Callmer has presented a discussion of differences and made some effort to interpret them. His terms for characterizing different areas has been "social aggregates", "ethnically distinct areas" and "special cultural areas" (Callmer 1991, 1992 and 1994 respectively (the last concept translated from Swedish by the author)). The author will argue that the characterization of different areas can be made more specific by studying the archaeological material and that the terminology and interpretations in general can be further elaborated.

In the present article, cultural differences between different settlement areas in present-day Scania and Blekinge in southern Sweden will be demonstrated. The discussion will mainly be based on differing burial customs and differing interactions with other areas. The discussion of interactions is presented on a very superficial level of analysis. As has been demonstrated by Callmer (1994), different forms of interaction can be discussed in much more detail. The demonstrated differences will be related to written sources, natural geography and the generalized mapping of Late Iron Age settlement.

I will argue that cultural, social, economic and other differences between smaller areas during the Late Iron Age have not yet been understood or emphasized enough. Many human collectives seems to have had a marked cultural identity, demonstrated in specific cultural traditions, which remain to be more intimately characterized in relation to different historical questions.

The diversity of Scania

Since Märta Strömberg's publication of 1961, there have been no thorough evaluations of the history of the Late Iron Age in present-day Scania considering the available archaeological sources in depth. Important results have however

been reached on a regional level, among which we may mention Richard Holmberg's study of west Scania, Birgitta Hårdh's study of the south-west, the work by the Ystad Project and Sten Tesch in the south, Märta Strömberg's and Berta Stjernquist's fieldwork and studies in the south-east and Johan Callmer's and Anne Carlie's discussions of the north-east (Holmberg 1977; Strömberg 1982; Callmer 1982, 1984; Tesch 1983; Hårdh 1984; Berglund 1991; Stjernquist 1993a, 1993b; Carlie 1994). Excavated Viking Age settlements have recently been surveyed by Dieter Meier (1995) and sites with known or probable Viking age graves by Hans Ulrich Kleiminger (1993).

During the early 1990s, there was a renewed interest among archaeologists in discussing Late Iron Age regionality and centrality in Scania. Evaluations of different types of centres have played an important role in this research. A generalized picture of Scania with two major regions has been put forward; one great region in the north-east around the plain of Kristianstad, with Vä as the most important centre, and another region in the south and south-west with Uppåkra as the most important centre (Fabech 1993; Anglert 1995). Based on his mapping of Late Iron Age settlement areas, Callmer has chosen to identify north-east Scania and Blekinge as "ethnically distinct areas" (1992, p. 100, fig. 1.).

As is evident from the works of Callmer and Fabech, Late Iron Age Scania consisted of several more or less distinct areas. However, there have not yet been any detailed evaluations of the archaeological material in order to characterize these different units. Culturally, the picture is certainly a lot more complicated than this cited division into two main areas.

As regards natural geography, Scania is very heterogeneous. In fig. 1, information about topography and major watercourses has been combined with settlement areas, landscape types and "ethnographical" boundaries during the early 18th century according to a study by Åke Camp-

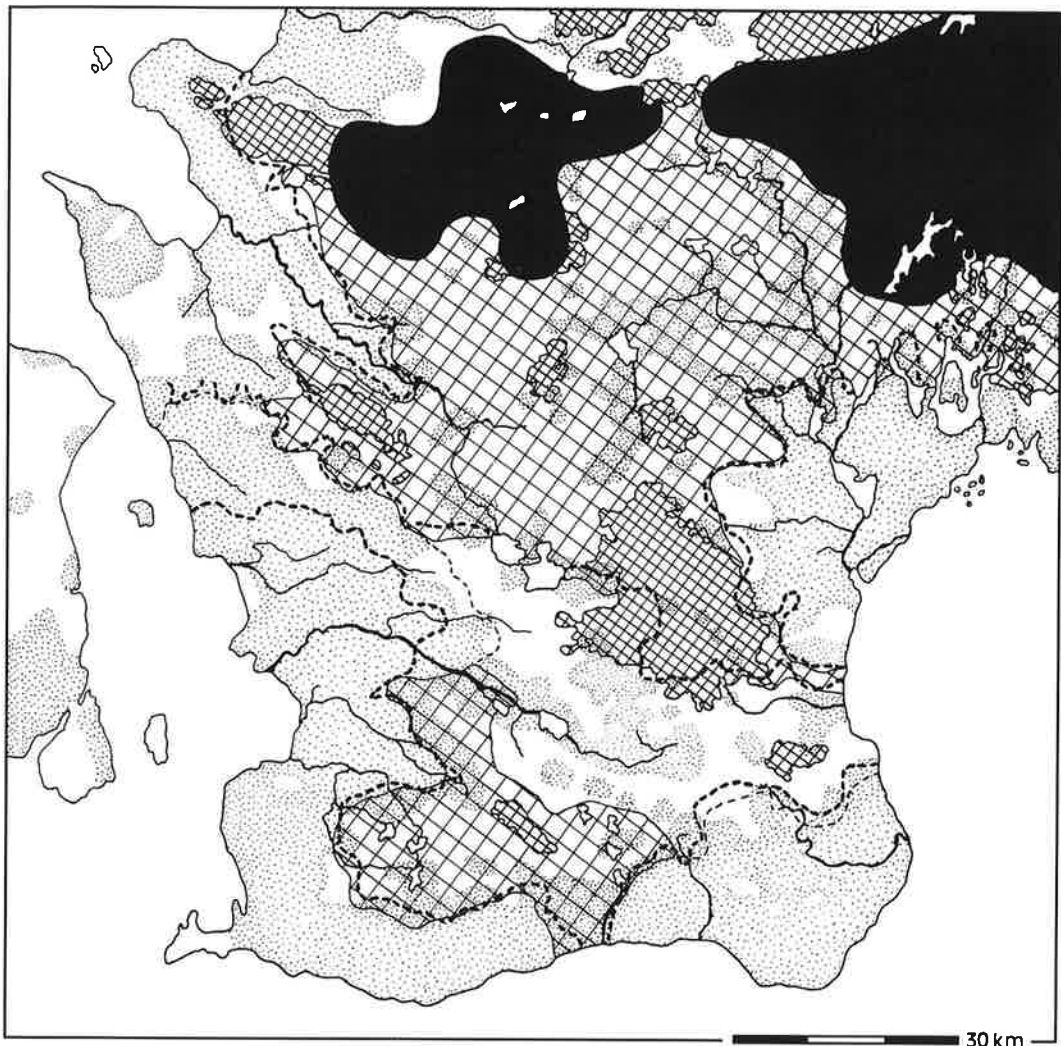


Fig. 1. Late Iron Age settlement in Scania according to Callmer 1991, p. 270, fig. 6 (dotted); Land over 133 metres above sea level (dense hatching) and major watercourses according to Bredsdorff 1973; areas without prehistoric monuments according to Hyenstrand 1984, p. 33, map 5 (black); woodlands (sparse hatching), borders between scrub country and plains (thin dashed lines, some minor borders in the north-east has been omitted) and main "ethnographic" borders during the early 18th century (thick dashed lines) according to Campbell 1928, maps I and IV.

bell (1928). Campbell's ethnography was based on differing types of grounds, buildings and systems of cultivation and fencing. This is of interest for comparisons with conditions in the Late Iron Age.

It is obvious that differing economic conditions and natural boundaries had a great influence on the density and extent of medieval

and post-medieval settlement of Scania. This can be seen in a study of settlement and economy during the mid 17th century by Sven Dahl (1942, pp. 10 ff.), which could be compared with medieval population density as reflected in parish sizes or church density (Rosborn 1984, pp. 70 f., figs. 1-2; Wienberg 1993, p. 74, fig. 36). When we relate Late Iron Age settlement to natural

geography and 17th–18th century circumstances as reflected in fig. 1, it seems appropriate to make some high-level observations: The settlement of the Viking Age most probably consisted of three large densely settled plain areas; an area along the west and south coast, an area around the Helgeå river in the north-east and an area in the south-east. Apart from these large areas, there were smaller units in the centre and in the forested areas of the north as well as areas in the north-west that appear to be divided rather than a large unit.

Early written sources do not give much information about political or cultural conditions in Scania. In the 6th century Jordanes mentions a *Bergio*, which can possibly be correlated with the area corresponding to the later Bjäre Hundred. It is also possible that Jordanes' *Luothida* has some correspondence with the later Luggude Hundred (Callmer 1991, pp. 258, 266). The sailor Wulfstan mentions a *Sconegin* in the late 9th century. How great a part of present Scania this concept identified is uncertain. Considering Wulfstan's route, it is possible that it only denoted the southern and western parts. It must also be noted that Wulfstan speaks of *Sconegas* as a *land* belonging to Denmark (Lund 1983a, pp. 7 ff.; 1983b, pp. 24 f.). In a peace treaty in 811 between the Franks and a king of the Danes, one of the Danish representatives was *Osfred of Scania* (*Annales Regni Francorum*). This fact, together with the statement of Wulfstan, suggests that at least a part of present-day Scania was under the lordship of west Danish kings for parts of the 9th century. However, the Danish kingdom that we find in the Frankish sources of the late 8th and early 9th century is perhaps best interpreted as if the main areas of the *Danes* were in Jutland, but that the present Danish islands, and Scania in the east were seen as the *marc* of the Danes, or their "border areas". There are indications of local rulers, for example the *godar*, mentioned on runic stones on Funen, or the stone for Sibbe on Öland, which say he "ruled land in Denmark" (Sawyer 1991, p. 279). We can compare information from Ottar in the late 9th century that Hedeby belonged to

the *Danes*, but the Danish islands to *Denmark* (Lund 1983b, p. 24). The division into "north Danes" and "south Danes" found in King Alfred's *Orosius* (supported by a runic stone on Lolland), also suggests Viking Age differences between east and west in the "Danish" area (Randsborg 1980, p. 17). There is also other evidence that would seem to separate developments in the east from those in the west (Nielsen 1990, pp. 152 ff.).

The division of Scania into hundreds was not conducted according to a unitary system. We can identify two different structures. The first consists of hundreds with names denoting settlement areas: Göinge, Gärd, Villand and Albo hundreds. In the second structure, the hundreds are named after a village or other locality (Anglert 1995, pp. 44 f.). The areas of the first structure were not called hundreds in the oldest written sources. In his discussion of the hundred names, Thorsten Andersson considered the name *Ljunits*, and probably also *Färs* and *Frosta*, as being related to older settlement areas. He also thought that the areas of *Bjäre*, *Luggude* and north and south *Åsbo* were also created out of older settlement areas, because of their character as separate settlement areas (Andersson 1965, pp. 78 ff.). East and west Göinge were one united area until 1637 (Carlie 1994, p. 198). North and south *Åsbo* was also in all probability formerly one single area (Pamp 1983, p. 29). The later Albo Hundred was called *Alsmarc* in 1120. The ending *-marc* has an older meaning of "border area" and consequently this settlement area can be interpreted as a border area between northern and southern greater areas. During the 12th century the later Villand Hundred was known as *Wetlandi* (Pamp 1983, pp. 26 f.).

In the late 11th century, Adam of Bremen does not separate different parts of Scania (Adam of Bremen 1984, pp. 207 f.), and neither does Saxo Grammaticus in his Danish history, written in the late 12th century. In one case, however, describing the rebellion of 1180–1182, Saxo speaks of *north Scanians* and *east Scanians*. The north Scanians in question came from the area in

the north-west and the east Scanians came down the ancient road from the settlements in the north-east (Blaaberg Jensen *et al.* 1996).

The picture we can reach by examining written sources and comparing settlement areas with natural geography and the partition into hundreds must now be compared with the picture of cultural diversity reflected in the archaeological material.

As a part of the work for my doctoral thesis I have registered excavated Viking Age graves in Scania (Fig. 2). This material suggests sharp differences even on a superficial level of analysis: In the west and south-west, the known graves and cemeteries consist almost exclusively of inhumations. In the south-east the predominant tradition is cremation, but a few inhumations occur. In the north-east, the few known graves are inhumations. Then there is an area with cremations in present-day West Göinge Hundred. The few excavated graves in the north-west can hardly be seen as representative of the burial customs here, and excavated graves are lacking in central Scania (Frosta and Färs hundreds).

Available indications make it probable that burial customs in the north-west differed from the strict tradition of inhumations practised in western Scania. First there is the uncertain cremation at Rya, and the certain cremation at Stridsdala (Fig. 2, nos. 2 and 3). Strömberg counted a cremation at Åstorp as a probable Viking Age burial (Strömberg 1961, II, p. 60), I have omitted it from fig. 2 on account of the insufficient dating evidence). A secondary cremation burial dated by the ¹⁴C method to the 9th century in an older stone setting has been excavated at the cemetery "Tofta högar" in Bjäre Hundred (Burenhult 1976, p. 31).

Several circumstances concerning the cemetery at Fjälkinge (Fig. 2, no. 46) make it different from the inhumation tradition as we know it from cemeteries in the west; such a large number of children's graves is not known from elsewhere (this might be partly explained by source-critical factors), the placing of some children in small

chests and the two cases of graves with Thor's hammers as a grave gift have no known counterparts elsewhere in Scania.

The cemeteries in the south-east (Ingelstorp, Järrestad and Albo hundreds), differ in many ways from those in the west and south-west as regards grave gifts. At least three graves here (two in Ingelstorp and one in Gårdlösa) contain equal-armed brooches. Burials with arm-rings of bronze are known from the cemeteries in Gislöv, Gårdlösa, Ravlunda and Torup. Neither equal-armed brooches nor arm-rings of bronze are known from burials in the areas of the inhumation tradition. In this context it should be noted that of the six equal-armed brooches and the three arm-rings of bronze from the Viking Age known to Strömberg in 1961, all but one object with known find location were from the three hundreds with cremation burials in the south-east (4 objects) or the areas with inhumations in the north-east (2 objects), the only exception being a very special equal-armed brooch (only one known parallel from Birka) from Stora Köpinge in Herrestad Hundred (Strömberg 1961, II, pp. 153 f., 160).

Among the high-status women's graves in the west are three known burials in carriages (Norrvidinge, Stävie and Önsvala), which have no counterparts in the rest of Scania.

Differences can be observed also in the weapon-grave custom. Of the ten graves with weapons known to the author in the area of inhumations in the west and south-west, seven have an axe or a sword as the only weapon (Norrvidinge, Stävie, Källby, Arlov, Lockarp, Bösarp and Ruuthsbo). Only two graves contain spearheads; a rather special case in Norrvidinge (a spearhead of Petersen's type F seems to have been stuck through the filling of the grave rather than placed beside the buried individual), and a grave in Önsvala with a sword combined with two spearheads of Petersen's type A (and possibly an axe). The tenth grave is a grave with a weapon-knife in Råga Hörstad. Of the six grave-finds including weapons in the south-east, no less than five include a spearhead (Tranås, Gnalöv, Hage-

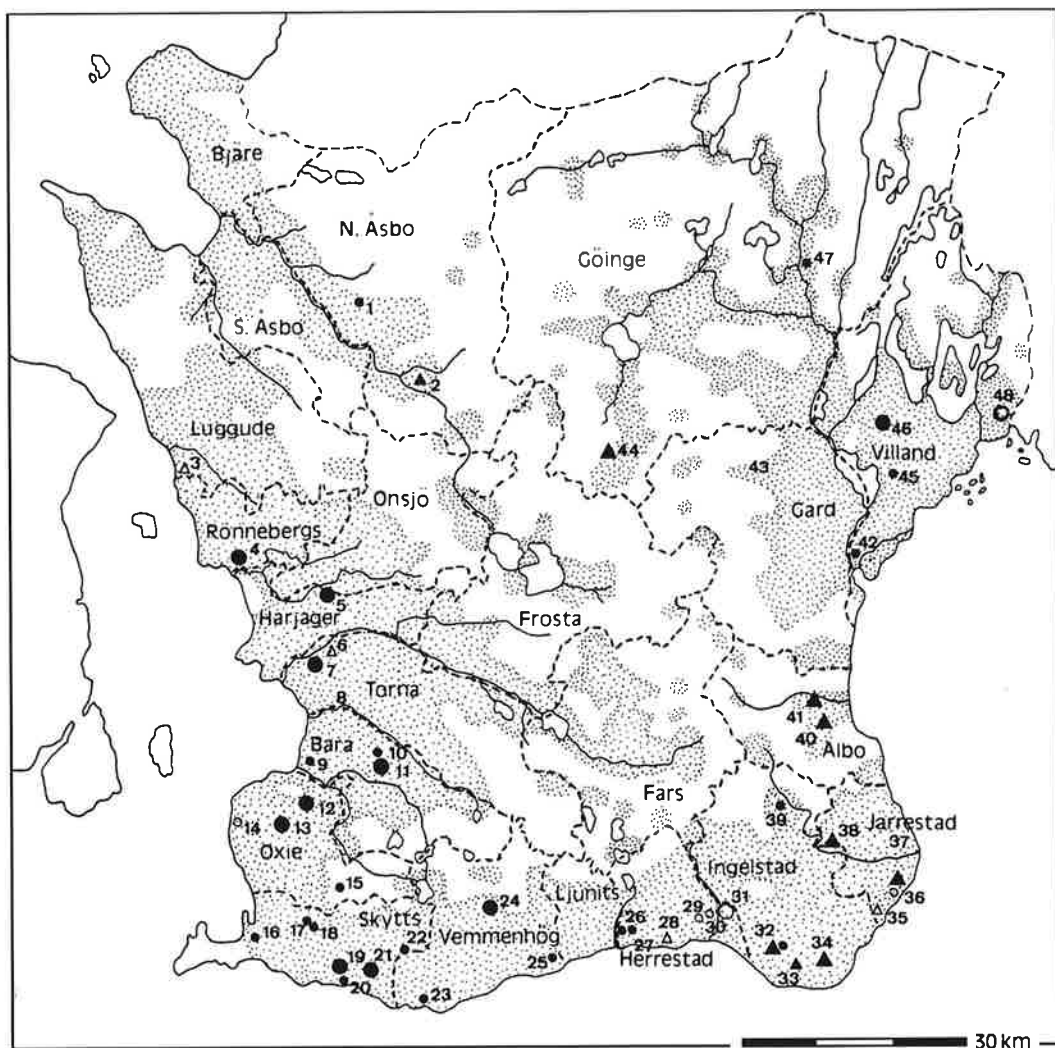


Fig. 2. The hundreds of Scania and excavated Viking Age graves. Large dot = inhumation cemetery, small dot = inhumation grave, large triangle = cremation cemetery, small triangle = cremation grave, unfilled symbols = uncertain, no symbol = non-determinable burial custom. S = Strömberg 1961 II. 1 Bjärsgård (S, pp. 48 f.), 2 Stridsdala (S, p. 51), 3 Rya (S, p. 44), 4 Råga Hörstad (Strömberg 1968), 5 Norrvidinge (unpublished, Lunds Universitets Historiska Museum), 6 Lackalånga (S, p. 62), 7 Stävie (Nagmér 1979), 8 Källby (S, p. 46), 9 Arlov (two graves, S, pp. 15 f.), 10 Önsvala (Bruzelius 1859), 11 Önsvala (Larsson 1982), 12 Virentofta (Hansen 1934), 13 Lockarp (Samuelson 1989; unpublished, Malmö museer), 14 Bunkeflo (Nagy 1976), 15 Södra Åkarp (S, p. 54), 16 Stora Hammar (S, p. 60), 17 Tofta (S, p. 58), 18 Fuglie (S, p. 58), 19 Trelleborg (S, pp. 63 f.; Hansson 1993; unpublished, Lunds Universitets Historiska Museum), 20 Trelleborg (Jeppsson 1995), 21 Kyrkoköpinge (S, p. 58), 22 Börsarp (S, p. 57), 23 Böste (S, p. 65), 24 Saritslöv (S, pp. 65 f.), 25 Örmölla (Hansson 1993a), 26 Ruuthsbo, Gustavsfält (S, p. 26), 27 Ruuthsbo, Östra gravfältet (S, p. 26), 28 Ystad (Strömberg 1978, pp. 90 ff.), 29 Fredriksberg (Cinthio 1946), 30 Lilla Köpinge (Tesch 1993, pp. 78 f.), 31 (Stora Köpinge (Tesch 1993, p. 127), 32 Ingelstorp (both symbols, Strömberg 1982), 33 Hagestad (unpublished; Strömberg 1962), 34 Valleberga (unpublished; S, p. 40), 35 Grosshög (Strömberg 1985, pp. 110 ff.), 36 Gislöv (both symbols, Strömberg 1985, pp. 121 ff.), 37 Gnalöv (S, p. 41), 38 Gårdlösa (Stjernquist 1993; 1993a), 39 Tranås (S, p. 31), 40 Torup (S, pp. 13 ff.), 41 Ravlunda (S, pp. 11 f.), 42 Härnestad (Moberg 1951), 43 Venestad (S, p. 23), 44 Vätteryd (Strömberg 1958), 45 Rinkaby (Mildner 1972), 46 Fjälkinge (S, p. 67; Helgesson 1996), 47 Västraby (S, p. 87), 48 Valje (Wahlöö 1967).

stad and two graves in Grosshög; spearheads of Petersen's types C, B, G?, K and M). As can be seen, even the types of spearheads differ from the only two known examples from graves in the west. The sixth grave comes from Gårdlösa and contains a knife as the only weapon. It should be noted that the only professionally excavated weapon-grave in the south-east is the grave from Gårdlösa. However, that does little to change the picture of a weapon-grave custom in this part of Scania being substantially different from that in the west and south-west.

At least 14 finds of Viking Age swords or parts of swords are known from Scania. Ten come from west Scania and Färs Hundred. Two finds have been made in Stora Köpinge and two in the great lakes around the plain of Kristianstad in the north-east (list of finds from Strömberg 1961, I, pp. 134 ff., with the addition of a later find from Stora Köpinge mentioned by Tesch 1993, p. 127). The swords seem to be connected to the areas with inhumation burials.

Looking at the spread of different types in the registration of spearheads in present Sweden by Lars Andersson, it is clear that spearheads typical of Gotland and/or the Mälaren valley occur only in the north-east and south-west of Scania (Andersson's types A1, C1a and C3b; Andersson 1972).

As a whole, the inhumation burial customs of west and south-west Scania are connected to the burial customs in areas to the west, in present-day Denmark (though burial customs were certainly not homogeneous over all of this area). This is clearly demonstrated, for example, by the contents of the late 10th and early 11th century prestige burials; equipment like the carriages (cf. Müller-Wille 1985) and axes of Petersen's types M and L (Norrvidinge, Stävie (?) and Lockarp). In Lockarp, a burial with spurs has been excavated. Such spurs are a common feature of Klavs Randsborg's "cavalry graves", which he preferred to associate with vassals of the west-Danish late 10th century kings (Randsborg 1980).

Viking Age imports from Britain or the

Carolingian empire to Scania before ca. AD 950 are almost exclusively known only from the western parts (the area of inhumations and the north-west). The known imports mainly consist of coins and high-quality Frankish mounts and come from the treasure finds (Hårdh 1976, nos. 40, 41, 66, 71, 85, 112, 124 and 142). In addition to these finds, a recently discovered Carolingian 9th-century mount from Löddeköpinge can be mentioned (unpublished, Riksantikvarieämbetet UV Syd, Lund) and a grave with a similar mount from Trelleborg (unpublished, cf. Strömberg 1961, II, pp. 63 f.). Horse equipment in the Late Vendel Period or Early Viking Age grave find from Källby is probably Carolingian (Wamers 1985, p. 73). The character and find circumstances of these objects suggests that people from the higher social levels of west Scania took part in early Viking raids to, and possibly trade with, the areas in question. The lack of comparable finds in the south-east and north-east makes it probable that people from here did not.

Four small brooches datable to the 10th or early 11th century from the south-east of Scania have been identified as a special type, not known from elsewhere (Strömberg 1987).

As has been mentioned, Viking Age spearheads from Scania seem to indicate eastward contacts for the south-eastern and north-eastern parts of Scania. Such contacts can also be exemplified by the runic stones of Elleköpinge and Simris (Anglert 1995, pp. 49 f.). As will later be demonstrated, the burial customs of south-east Scania are very close to the traditions of Blekinge.

Fabech has previously noticed the eastern connections of north-east Scania (1993, pp. 234 ff.), but I will argue that in the Viking Age this is certainly also true for south-east Scania.

From this short exposé of some of the available sources it seems most probable that present-day Scania consisted of three major cultural groups – groups of people sharing some cultural traditions – in the Viking Age. These can be characterized by studying differing cultural traditions reflected

in the burial customs. The groups can be related to the three separated densely populated plain areas. Comparing the early medieval division into hundreds, which in all probability was a system based on earlier forms of territoriality, it seems probable that even finer partitions into smaller units existed. In addition to these main cultural groups there were several smaller units. An area corresponding to the later West Göinge Hundred seems to have been one (cf. Fabech 1993, pp. 224 f.) and the areas in the north-west possibly several more. While the group in the west and south-west seems to be culturally related to areas in the west and to have contacts with present-day England and the Carolingian realm in the 9th and early 10th century, the material from the south-east and north-east suggests interactions mostly eastwards.

The wild people called Blekingar

In the late 11th century, Adam of Bremen has many good things to say about Bishop Egino. Among other great achievements he is said to have "won for Christ many peoples that were still devoted to the worship of idols, above all the wild people called Blekingar, and those who live on the island of Holm, neighbours of the Götar (Adam av Bremen 1984, p. 208, my translation from Swedish). This text suggests two things of interest for the present discussion: that the Blekingar were Christianized around the mid and late 11th century and that they were looked upon as a rather odd people from the horizon of Adam of Bremen.

The information from Adam can be compared to statements by Wulfstan, nearly 200 years earlier. He mentioned Blekinge, or *Blecinga eg*, and said that it was a *land* belonging to the Svear (Lund 1983, pp. 24 f.). Such statements as the ones made by Adam or Wulfstan are classifications made by outsiders and do not necessarily say much about the identity that would be ascribed to the people then inhabiting present-day Blekinge by themselves. However, they must be considered

when trying to discuss the history of the area.

The Viking Age in Blekinge has most importantly been studied by Karl-Axel Björkquist and Thomas Persson, who have done basic work on chronology and monuments. Ingemar Atterman has treated a cultural landscape and maritime blockages in eastern Blekinge, as well as the Late Iron Age cemeteries. Leif Stenholm has created an overall historical picture of the period. The present author has lately discussed the Viking Age finds and monuments and continued Atterman's work with the maritime blockages (Björkquist & Persson 1979; Atterman 1967; 1983; Stenholm 1986; Svanberg 1994; 1995). As was mentioned above, Callmer has identified Blekinge as an "ethnically distinct area".

Compared to Scania, the Late Iron Age archaeological material has not been studied or published to any great extent. The Viking Age settlement (Fig. 3) was concentrated in the coastal zone. The extent of the settlement can easily be related to (and to a great extent explained by) natural geographic conditions (cf. Berglund 1966, p. 11, fig. 3).

The Late Iron Age cemeteries of Blekinge have been described in the earlier archaeological research as having a special character compared to the cemeteries of Scania and Småland (cf. Björkquist & Persson 1979, p. 64; Atterman 1983). However, there are strong similarities between these and the cemeteries of south-east Scania and also the cemetery of Vätteryd in central Scania.

The excavated datable Viking Age graves (Fig. 3) seem to consist exclusively of cremations. The only possible exception known to the author is an inhumation grave (not datable in itself) which was placed stratigraphically over a Vendel period grave at the cemetery of Johannishus RAÄ 45–46.

The outer constructions of the graves are better known than those in Scania. They can be best described as varied, consisting of mostly small mounds and round stone settings, but these are combined with a variety of other features (Svanberg 1994, p. 17, table 1).

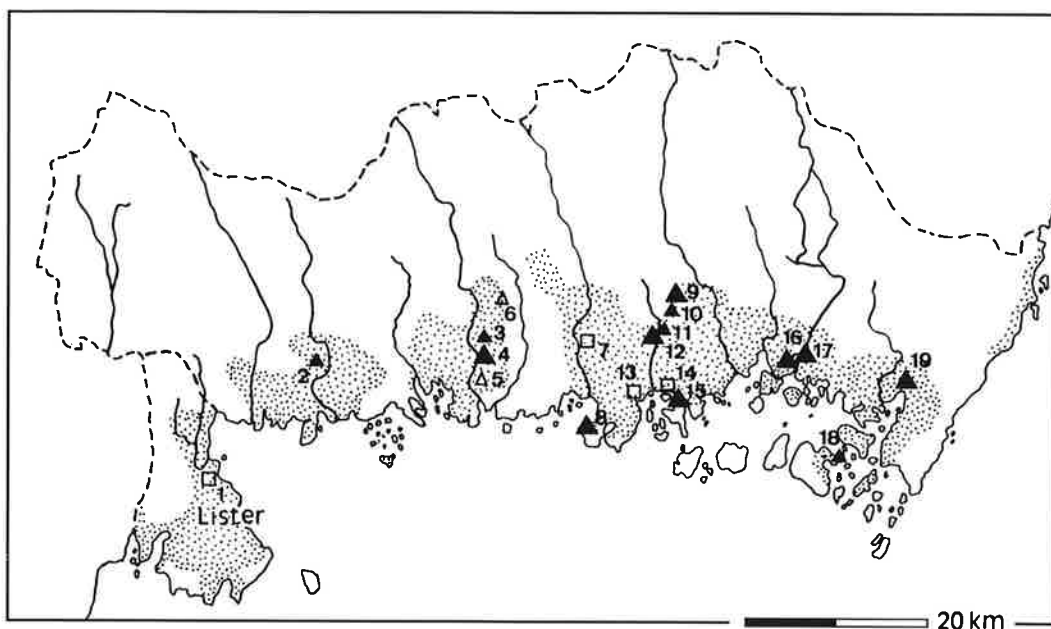


Fig. 3. Late Iron Age settlement in Blekinge (dotted, after Svanberg 1994, p. 50, fig. 17); major watercourses (Bredsdorff 1973) and excavated Viking Age graves. The medieval border between Blekinge proper and Lister is shown as a broken line. Large triangle = cremation cemetery, small triangle = cremation grave, unfilled triangle = uncertain cremation, unfilled square = uncertain grave find. B&P = Björkquist & Persson 1979, SHM = Historiska museet, Stockholm, BLM = Blekinge läns museum, Karlskrona. 1 Norje (unpublished; SHM 4596:h), 2 Asarum (unpublished, BLM 500–503), 3 Bräkne Hoby (unpublished; SHM 1452:271), 4 Mörtjuk (unpublished; B&P, pp. 37, 54), 5 Väby (unpublished; SHM 9536:6), 6 Stora Silpinge (unpublished; SHM 9536:7), 7 Ronneby (B&P, p. 39), 8 Byrum (Persson 1976), 9 Johannishus (Hjortsberga Parish RAÄ 45–46, B&P, pp. 36 ff.; Nagmér 1982), 10 Johannishus (Hjortsberga Parish RAÄ 38, Nagmér 1982), 11 Hjortsberga (Hjortsberga Parish RAÄ 14, B&P, p. 45), 12 Hjortsberga (Hjortsberga Parish RAÄ 8, B&P, pp. 36 ff.), 13 Bökenäs (unpublished; BLM 1590–1591), 14 Lilla Vambåsa (unpublished; BLM 12703 a-d), 15 Hjortahammar (B&P, pp. 37 ff.), 16 Vedeby (B&P, p. 37), 17 Augerum (unpublished, SHM 1452:234, 235, SHM 1453:356, 410), 18 Skällnäs (unpublished; BLM 16924:1–2), 19 Hallarum (Atterman 1967, unpublished; SHM 1452:127, 153, 154, 156, SHM 1543).

The contents of the graves have strong similarities to those of south-east Scania. At least five grave finds comprise equal-armed brooches (Lilla Vambåsa, Hjortsberga RAÄ 8, Johannishus RAÄ 45–46 (2) and Vedeby) and four graves contains arm-rings of bronze (Johannishus RAÄ 45–46 (2), Ronneby and Mörtjuk).

Some grave finds differ from the Scanian material. Five different grave finds comprise bronze pendants (Byrum, Hjortahammar, Hjortsberga RAÄ 8, Johannishus RAÄ 45–46 and Hallarum). These pendants are a clearly “eastern” type of

artefact, comparable primarily to material from present-day eastern and central Sweden. I know only two Viking Age graves with bronze pendants from Scania (Norrvidinge and Fuglie, Map 2). The Scanian pendants are however of a special character and do not parallel the examples from Blekinge. Both are most likely cheaper imitations of the more exclusive Terslev type brooches (cf. Capelle 1968, pp. 80 ff., cf. Karte 31). Another type of jewellery encountered in graves from Blekinge is small round brooches, which are included in three different grave finds (one grave

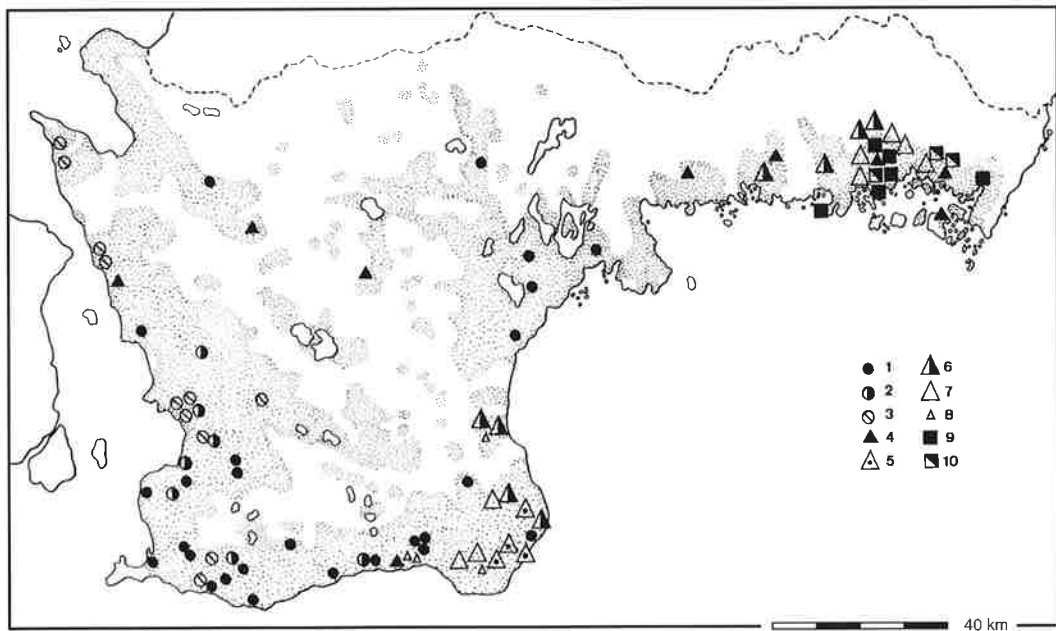


Fig. 4. Archaeological material from the Viking Age used in the article for evaluating a division into cultural groups ca. 800–1000. 1 Inhumation grave or cemetery, 2 Inhumation graves with a sword or an axe as the only weapon, 3 Imports from the Carolingian empire or England before ca. 950, 4 Cremation grave or cemetery, 5 Graves with spearheads in south-east Scania, 6 Graves with arm-rings of bronze, 7 Graves with equal-armed brooches, 8 Finds of south-east Scanian local type of brooches (Strömberg 1987), 9 Graves with bronze pendants in Blekinge, 10 Graves with small round brooches (cemeteries which includes graves of types no. 2, 5, 6, 7, 9 or 10 have not been given symbols of type 1 or 4).

from Hjortahammar and two graves from Vedeby). Round brooches do not occur in any Viking Age grave find from Scania.

I know only two certain weapon-graves from Blekinge. A non-expert-collected grave find from Väby contained a late Viking Age axe as the only weapon. The other find consists of a spearhead of Petersen's type K, said to have been found in a grave-mound in Norje. In addition to these finds there is also a spearhead of Petersen's type K that comes from an area close to the church of Lösen Parish in east Blekinge, probably the site of a devastated cemetery (SHM 9222:21). These weapon finds are too small as material for any generalizations.

It is quite clear that the people inhabiting present-day Blekinge during the Viking Age should be recognized as a specific cultural group.

Their graves reflect special cultural traditions, differing from those of neighbouring areas. As was mentioned above, contemporary or almost contemporary written sources discuss them as a special people inhabiting a special land. The burial customs have clear parallels to the customs of south-east Scania.

The hundred division of Blekinge splits the province into four parts. The Lister peninsula was a separate hundred, and also in other respects counted as a special unit during the Middle Ages. In terms of natural geography (with its consequences for agrarian economy), it differs from the rest of Blekinge. Its character or special cultural traits during the Late Iron Age are very hard to discuss on account of the very small available archaeological material. Three runic stones from the 7th century with obvious com-

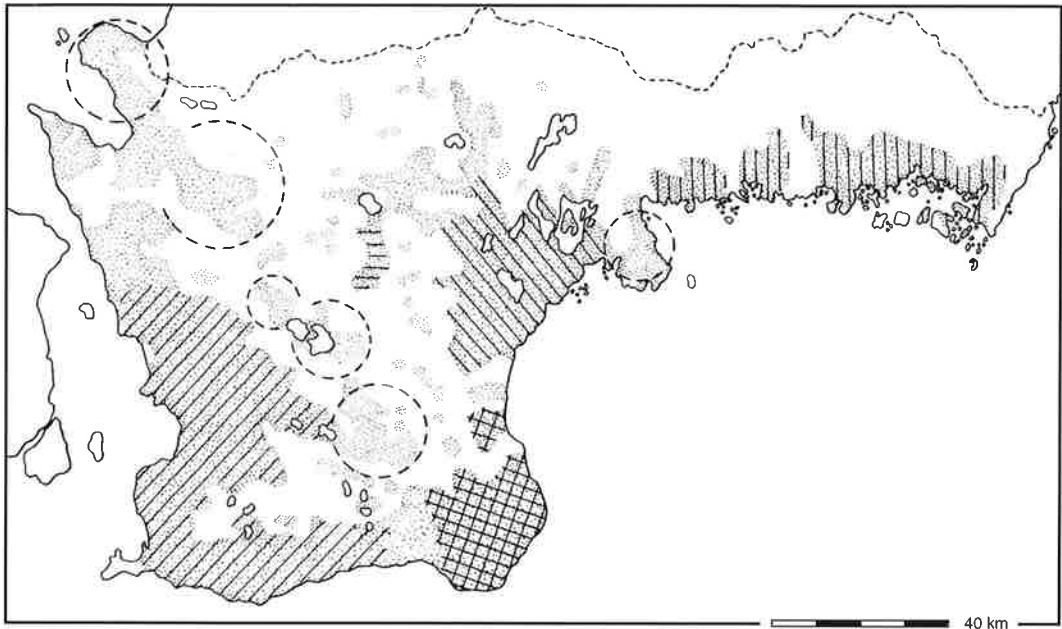


Fig. 5. Cultural groups in present Scania and Blekinge ca. 800–1000 as discussed in the present study.

mon traits could be interpreted as manifestations of petty chiefs controlling Lister at this time (Stenholm 1986, pp. 54 ff.; Svanberg 1994, pp. 22 f.). The settlement of Blekinge proper was divided into Västtra (western), Medelsta (middle) and Östra (eastern) hundreds, which seems to be a logical partition of an area that was primarily regarded as a larger unit.

Discussion

In the very brief study presented here, I have demonstrated how differences in cultural traditions reflected in burial customs, and in contacts with other regions, can be related to other sources in trying to grasp the diversity of different human collectives in present-day Scania and Blekinge ca. 800–1000 (Fig. 4; Fig. 5).

It might seem a tempting hypothesis to regard the burial customs as a “cultural theme” of importance for the self-constructed identity of some human collectives. In some areas the traditions seem very restricted, while in others

they may be less rigid. The idea of studying culture through a selected theme, a small part of the entity with intense cultural meanings, is close to the way many ethnologists work (Ehn & Löfgren 1994). The relation between burial customs and identity in the area of study must be further discussed.

The interpretation of the differences demonstrated in the article also remains to be further elaborated. In the study, the term *cultural group* has been used. The groups in question can also be related to discussions incorporating other perspectives, for example politics, centre–periphery relations or ethnicity. The connection between differing cultural traditions and such perspectives must also be discussed in that case.

One must be careful when trying to relate archaeologically characterized groups to the early mentions of names of peoples or lands in written sources. The interpretation of such names is by no means simple (cf. Wallerström 1997).

The partition into a western and eastern sphere of contacts of the discussed cultural groups can

be supported by other material. For example, we can mention the spread of early "Danish" coins, soapstone items and some eastern or western types of Scandinavian bronze jewellery (Steuer 1987, Abb. 5, 18 and 21) and the finds of oriental-type belt fittings (Jansson 1987, figs. 11 and 12).

The picture of cultural contacts and cultural diversity is partly transformed from the mid 10th century onwards. An important part of the changes consisted of a cultural and political conformity to the customs of the Christian church and the administration of the Danish kingdom. It must be argued that the history of these developments should be primarily discussed on a regional level. The developments in all probability meant something of a break in traditions and cultural contacts for the three eastern cultural groups, while it must be seen in another way when west and south-west Scania, with traditional contacts westwards, are concerned.

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