

For Gods and Men to Behold

Excavations at an Iron Age Grave-Field in Färlöv, 1996–1998

BY TONY BJÖRK

Abstract

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During the last few years, the author has excavated an Iron Age burial ground in Färlöv, a village north-west of Kristianstad. Several important finds have been made, including remains of previously destroyed monuments and recovered artefacts. Worth mentioning are three extremely large ship-settings, of approximately 40, 50 and 80 m length, a weapon grave with a Roman bronze vessel, filled with burnt bones of two individuals and a number of iron weapons, and a rune-stone given a very early dating by the experts.

In the light of these new finds the author discusses the questions of regional division and the hierarchy of the Iron Age communities in Skåne, based on finds from the Roman Iron Age. The large ship-settings are discussed both as a regional phenomenon for the display of rank and as complex grave monuments. Some suggestions are also given as to where the settlements in the area around Färlöv were located and what happened after the burial ground was abandoned. The reader is also presented with ideas as to when and why the grave-field was destroyed.

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Introduction

Skåne became Swedish in 1658 after a series of bitter wars with Denmark. In the period between the late Iron Age and that year, Skåne was a Danish province and therefore must be considered in the light of Danish history, a perspective which will be clarified further on. But let us begin at a somewhat later stage. In 1749 the scientist Carl von Linné (Linnaeus) travelled through the province of Skåne on the important mission for the Swedish king and the government to explore the natural resources of this new region. On his journey Linné passed the village of Färlöv in north-eastern Skåne, where he made an observation that fortunately was written down.

I quote, daring a translation into English: “The church of Färlöv $\frac{1}{2}$ quarter from Åby. Here many tall and narrow stones stood upright in the fields, and in many places they were set up in oblong rings. These were unmistakably remnants of old tombs” (Linné 1749, p. 124). His self-confident assumption has later proved to be absolutely correct.

The standing stones were also marked in the mapping of Skåne undertaken in 1812–20 by the military, though at this time most of the stones already seemed to have been removed. The number of stones on this map is almost identical with the appearance of the grave-field

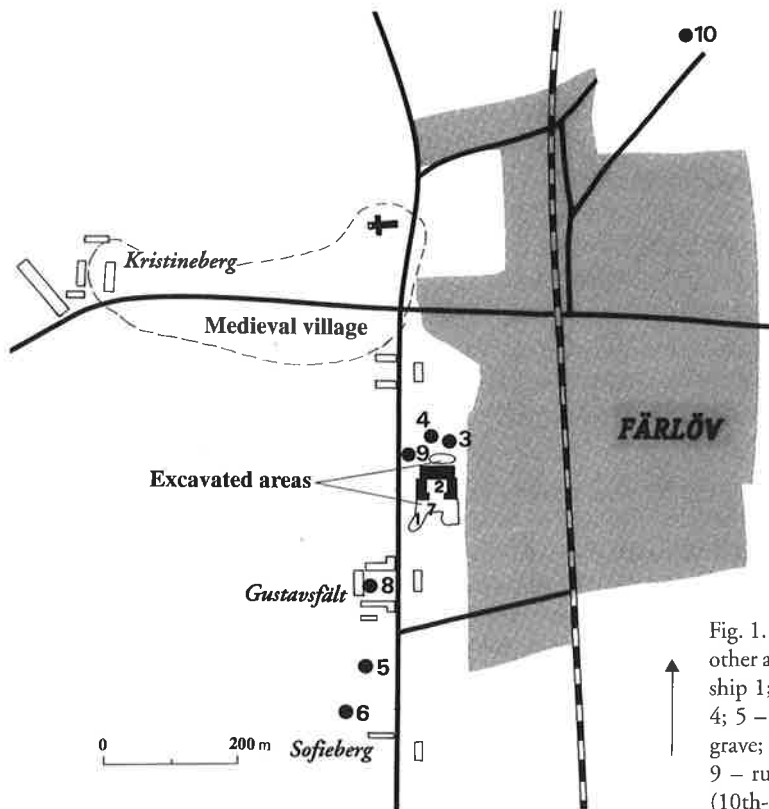


Fig. 1. The Iron Age burial ground and other ancient monuments at Färlöv. 1 – ship 1; 2 – ship 2; 3 – ship 3; 4 – ship 4; 5 – ship 5; 6 – ship 6; 7 – weapon grave; 8 – barrow with standing stones; 9 – rune-stone; 10 – Viking age pots (10th-century burial ground).

today. Today there are no more than 28 stones, of which 12 are part of a small ship-setting which is 5 m wide and 18 m long. The rest are spread along 450 meters of the north – south oriented height, or ridge, with a primarily western exposure towards the plain reaching the small river Vinneå, and beyond.

Prelude and excavation

Our work at the site began due to an extension of an old people's home, built in the early 1960s on what was once the middle of the burial ground. At that time, according to local residents, a small investigation was carried out in order to determine whether any graves or other remains were affected, but nothing was found. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any further information about this first digging on the grave-field in modern times. Local people

have also told us that as late as the beginning of the 1960s, there were still some long, thin boulders lying visible along the road. These were either removed or covered by soil during the first building period. The material originating from the excavation work for the basement of the main building was used for levelling the area around the complex.

When the excavations started we soon understood that we were facing a dense part of the burial ground with remains of one, or perhaps two, ship-settings, as well as a number of other structures. At this point the builders changed their plans and in order to save money they avoided the part of the area where one of the ship-settings was located. Soon after this, in December 1996, the weather became too cold for proper excavating. For this reason, and at the specific request of our principals, the work was carried out in three seasons, with rather small

areas in short periods of time excavated on each occasion. In total the excavated areas were 2700 square metres, divided into two main shafts and a large number of small trenches, the latter due to the planting of trees. Hitherto the excavations have been presented in three short articles in between fieldwork (Björk 1998; Björk & Edring 1997, 1998).

The weapon grave

At the very beginning of the dig, we focused on a grave that consisted of an elongated pit, containing some stones about 0.1 m large and a well-grouped handful of burnt bones. The bones were the remains of a human adult, but no further information as to age or sex could be obtained (Arcini, in press). Under this grave was a round pit with a depth of 0.9 m. In it there was a cover in the form of four stones, standing upright, surrounding one that was lying horizontally. The parts could easily be put together to form one larger, flat stone that had been divided for this purpose. Under the horizontal slab was a bronze vessel filled with iron objects and burnt bones.

The bronze vessel is an imported object from the Roman Empire in the form of a so-called "Östlandskittel". It is of Eggers type E 40 (Lund Hansen 1987, p. 375, Tafel 6), and it is 19 cm high and 27 cm wide, at most. The vessel has an iron handle and its bottom has been repaired with bronze sheet, attached with bronze rivets. This kind of bronze vessel is hitherto only known in one example from Skåne, which comes from a rich weapon grave in Simris (Lund-Hansen 1987, p. 449; Nicklasson 1997, p. 250 f.). The Färlöv vessel contained two swords, two lanceheads, two spearheads, two shield bosses (including eight rivets), two shield handles, one shield binding, two pairs of spurs and two small human figures made of thin bronze sheet (Fig. 2). This makes it a double, classical collection of weapons, which is verified by the burnt bones. The bone material has shown to be remains of two men, both adult, and for one of them the age

has been determined as 20–40 years (Arcini, in press). All objects had been burnt at the cremation and the larger ones had been broken or folded to fit into the vessel. As a result of this, it is harder to form an opinion of them, and they are of course very fragile.

The swords are both double-edged and have straight hilts ending in pommels. Sword 1 has been folded 5 times and its length can be estimated as 65.6 cm for the blade and 12.9 cm for the hilt. This gives a total length of about 78.5 cm. The blade has a maximum width of 5 cm where it meets the hilt. Sword 2 has been folded 6 times and its length can be estimated as 55.5 cm for the blade and 14.5 cm for the hilt, giving a total length of about 71 cm. The blade has a maximum width of 6.5 cm where the blade meets the hilt. The smaller sword is coarser and gives a heavier impression, but at the same time both swords are so similar in their manufacturing technique that it is likely that they were made by the same smith.

The lanceheads are both of iron. Lancehead 1 has a total length of about 27.4 cm. It has a bent point, the edges are somewhat folded and the socket is deformed. Lancehead 2 has a total length of 24.5 cm. It has a broken blade, the edges are folded and the socket is deformed. Both of them are of Ilkjær's type 17, Vennaker, according to Ilkjær's definitions. The Vennaker type is regarded as a form of broad Vennolum lancehead, also described as a hybrid form between Vennolum and Skiaker, both dating to C1b (Ilkjær 1990, pp. 40, 95, 120).

The spearheads are of iron. Spearhead 1 has a total length of about 21.5 cm. It has been bent together and the socket is deformed. Spearhead 2 has a total length of 17.8 cm. It is broken at the point where the blade meets the socket, and the socket is deformed. Spearhead 1 is of type 6, Illerup, a hybrid form between Simris and Skiaker, and spearhead 2 is of type 2, Hval, both according to Ilkjær's definitions. The dating must be between B2 and C1b (Ilkjær 1990, pp. 165, 183, 187, 200).

The shield bosses are of iron and they are

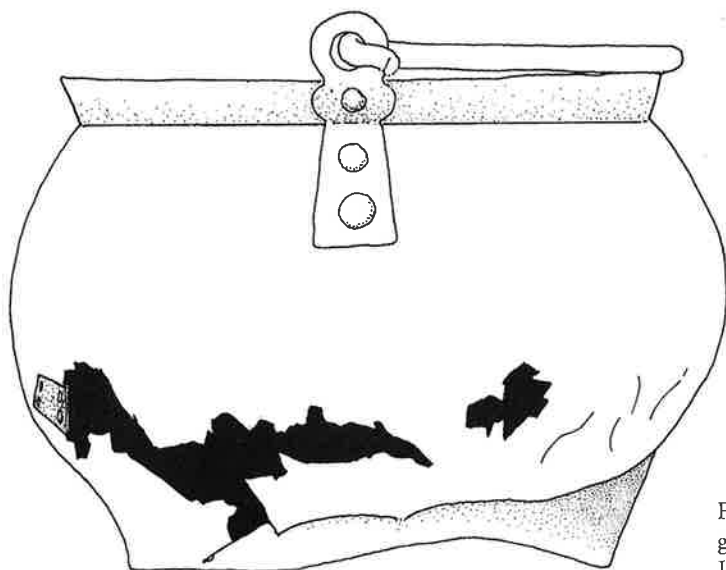


Fig. 2 (a + b). Contents of the weapon grave. All objects 1:3. Drawing by Jimmy Juhlin.

fragmented into a number of pieces. As a result of this they were particularly hard to determine. There is, however, no doubt that both of them are hemispherical, and in my opinion they are of Zieling's type R1, dated to C1a–C2 (Zieling 1989, pp. 139 f., Tafel 17). Ilkjær calls the type 5b and dates it to C1b exclusively (Ilkjær 1990, p. 35, Abb. 199).

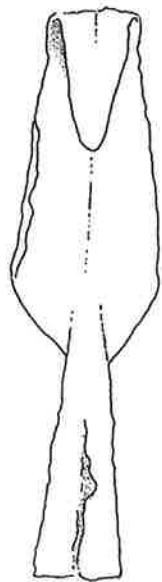
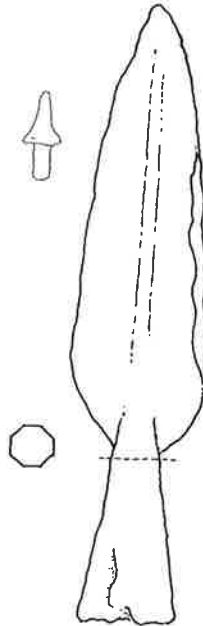
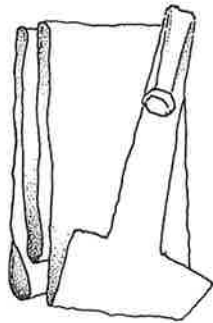
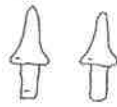
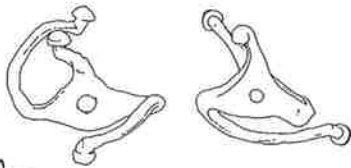
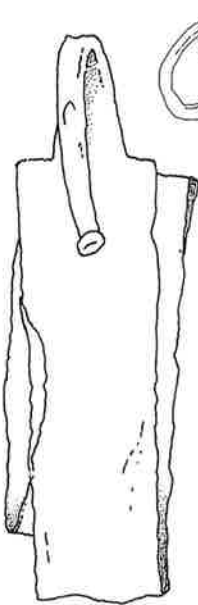
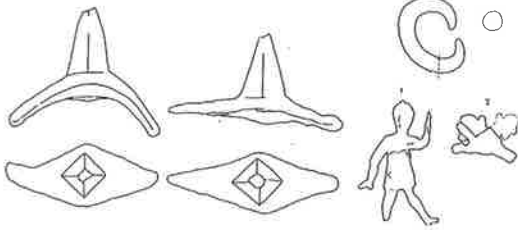
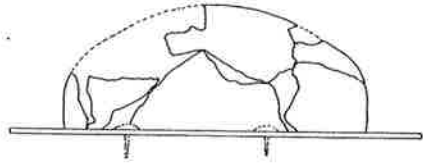
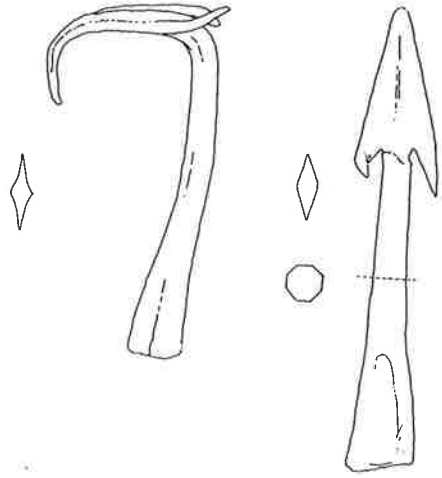
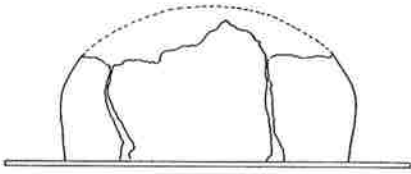
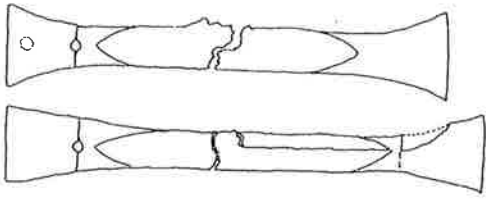
The rivets from the shield bosses – and perhaps also from the shield handles – are of iron and they all have the same kind of round, flat heads. They seem to be of an intermediate form between Zieling's type B and C. For this reason I do not believe that they can contribute to the dating of the grave (Zieling 1989, pp. 256 ff., Tafel 34).

The shield handles are of iron and they have been broken in several pieces. In spite of this they are relatively easy to determine, thanks to their characteristic form. They are of Zieling's type V2, and should be dated to B2–C1b (Zieling 1989, pp. 220 f., Tafel 30).

The single shield binding is a simple bronze sheet, folded over one of the edges of the shield and held in place by small rivets. The binding is of Zieling's type A, dated to B2–C1b (Zieling 1989, pp. 227 f., Tafel 32).

The spurs are of iron and represent two different types of knob spurs. The first are a pair of compact spurs with edges along the middle of the bows and four-edged points. The second pair is harder to specify, but I believe that they fit into the knob spur group, although they also have hook ends. The first pair fits well into Jahn's series, ending with knob spurs of the Färlöv kind, dating to the late 2nd or 3rd century, and comparing with Nicklasson it seems most likely to put both pairs in B2–C1b (Jahn 1921, pp. 50, 51, Abb. 50–58, Tafel 1; Nicklasson 1997, e.g. pp. 238 f., 252 f.). Spurs are considered to reveal high status and they seem to be relatively common in weapon graves in Skåne, compared with other areas (Nicklasson 1997, pp. 94, 142, 162, fig. 57).

The bronze figures, which are of thin bronze sheet, may have been decorations on clothes, sword belt or shield. It is also possible that their function was to show the owner's status or as amulets. The closest parallels of full-bodied human figures found are two examples from Illerup (Denmark) and Frøihov (Norway), in both cases decorations on sword belts (Ilkjær 1996a, pp. 99 ff. 317 ff.; Ilkjær 1996b, pp. 96 f.; Ilkjær 1996c, Tafel 97, 98).



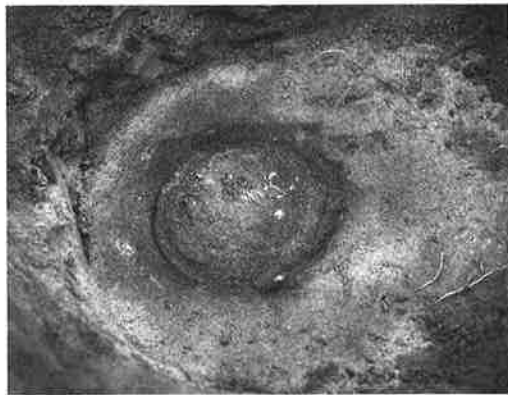


Fig. 3. Excavation of the weapon grave in four stages. Photos by T. Björk.

The overall dating of the objects can be set to period C1b. As a whole the material points to C1 in general, but there are some artefacts that narrow it down to C1b. They are the lanceheads and perhaps the shield bosses, both types exclusive for this period according to Ilkjær (1990, pp. 107, 328, 330). The whole outfit fits well into Ilkjær's grave group 5. This group contains new types of hemispherical shield bosses (for example Zieling's type R1), Hval, Folkeslunda and Simris spearheads, and two-edged swords begin to dominate the picture. The most common Roman import in this group is the "Östland" vessel (Ilkjær 1990, pp. 286 f.).

The grave lay in the centre of a round grave monument, at the time of the documentation consisting of 15 shallow pits. The grave circle had an outer diameter of just under 12 m, and

we assume that there had originally been 22 stones around the grave, which would give it a less fragmented and instead a more symmetric look. Furthermore, the features were of such shallow appearance, and the soil they were filled with of such uniformity (unfortunately none with charcoal), that they can scarcely be considered as post-holes. This indicates that the grave circle was the remains of either a stone setting or a barrow, surrounded by a line of stones at the edge. It is also possible, although in my opinion not as likely, that it could have been a circle of standing stones (Swedish *domarring*). There were in fact no traces of any covering of stones or soil, but it consequently seems most likely that the grave originally was covered by a stone setting or a barrow. There are also a number of examples from the period in Sweden of graves with weap-

ons, sometimes with Roman imports, which were found in cairns, stone settings and barrows (Nicklasson 1997, pp. 194 ff.), but no evidence of these exclusive find categories has been found in circles of standing stones.

In the left half of the grave circle were four graves, with sparse burnt bones in each, forming a square measuring 3 x 4 m. The reason for the regular pattern is unknown, but the phenomenon has been observed on some occasions, either occurring singly or inside circles of standing stones and square stone settings. Strömberg has interpreted them as houses for the dead, linked to burial rituals (Strömberg 1961, pp. 59, 70 f. and Anders Edring, oral information about an excavation in Norra Åsum, Skåne, 1996). One of the cremation graves of the Färlöv square was radiocarbon-dated, but unfortunately the sample gave a result that would place it in the Mesolithic (8765 ± 80 BP, Ua 13051). There is an obvious mixture of older material on the site, a problem which we will return to.

With the six graves mentioned above, there were a total of nine cremation graves inside the grave circle, which clearly makes this the densest part of the grave-field. One of them contained a blue glass bead and one contained a small potsherd, none of them datable closer than to the Iron Age in general. Less than 150 m south-west of the weapon grave lies a still visible mound of approx. 10 m in diameter. On top of it are two standing stones, but it is said that as late as the beginning of this century there was a third stone. I believe that this could very well be the monument over a second weapon grave.

Three ship-settings

From the very start of the excavations we encountered remains of two large ship-settings (ship 1 and 2), and at the final part of the examination we found a third one (ship 3). The ships had, in numerical order, been 50, about 80 and at least 40 m long, measurements that are well over the average for this kind of burial monument. But before discussing what they

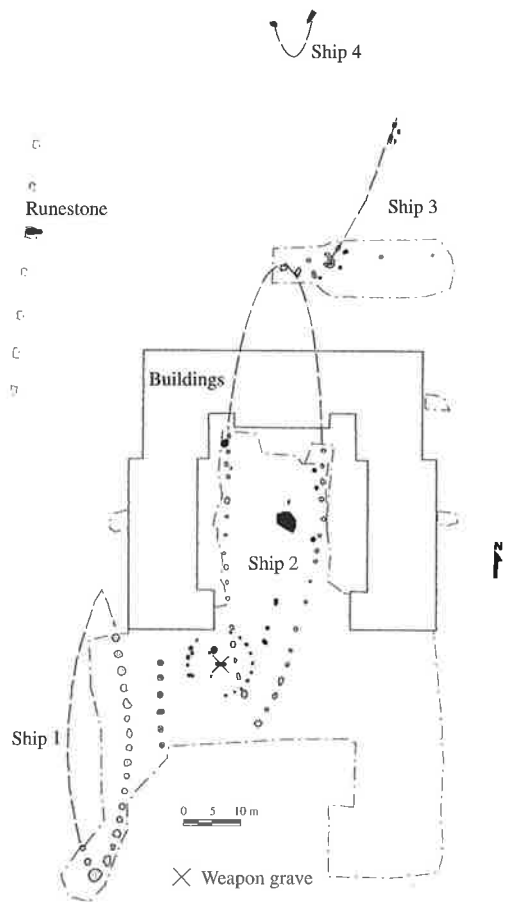


Fig. 4. Excavated areas and monuments. Extract of relevant features by Anders Edring.

represent we must begin with a brief description of each one of them, including some of the circumstances of their examination.

Ship 1 was discovered first and was the best preserved of the three. It was estimated to have been 50 m long and 13 m wide, consisting of a total of 19 uncovered foundations for standing stones, which had long since been removed, in the form of pits, with or without smaller supporting stones. Half the ship was uncovered by the removal of the soil when the builders, with support from the regional, antiquarian authorities, prevented us from excavating further (as mentioned above). Some charcoal was nevertheless collected from the top of a couple of the



Fig. 5. Stone foundation with supporting stones, belonging to ship 2. Photo T. Björk.

uncovered foundations and one of the samples has been dated by ^{14}C analysis to 1150 ± 100 BP (LuA 4282).

Ship 2 was the largest but worst preserved of the ship-settings. It was estimated to have been 80 m long and 17 m wide and consisted of 33 excavated foundations for standing stones. It is possible that we encountered the northern end-stone in the shaft north of the main building. The limited size of the shaft makes it impossible to give a final answer to the question, although it seems most likely. The fact that there are three more pits of similar size, just east of the "ideal" foundation, is puzzling. The length of ship 2 is however indisputable: it must be about 80 m. At least 8 foundations had previously been destroyed, and the total number of stones is estimated at 50. The excavated foundations varied from a diameter of 0.5–1.4 m and a depth of 0.1–0.6 m. Only 4 of the 33 foundations contained supporting stones and 18 contained finds of charcoal, burnt bones and/or flint artefacts/waste. Three more foundations contained fragments of brick or potsherds from historic time. The burnt bones from eight of the foundations have been determined as human in two cases, animal in two cases, human and animal in one case and as a final category as undetermined human or animal in three cases (Arcini, in press). Two samples of charcoal from founda-

tions have been dated to 1250 ± 100 BP and 1940 ± 70 BP (Lu 4308 and Ua 13053). Inside ship 2 we found 6 cremation or sacrificial pits, and a sooty layer of some 15 m², containing mixed material of burnt animal bones, late medieval or later pottery, fragments of bricks and modern glass. This seems very little, but we must consider that the area has been intensively cultivated, and also that large-scale diggings have taken place during building, drainage, and so on, during the last 30 years.

Ship 3 was only touched on to a very limited extent. The two foundations that were found were however clearly connected with two of the four standing stones still in position north of the buildings and a parking area. It can be estimated to have been at least 40 m long. The estimation is based entirely on the constructed line linking the excavated features with the two stones, and should be considered as a suggestion rather than a truth. There are at this point no radiocarbon-dated samples from ship 3.

Apart from the partly excavated ship-settings there are visible remains of three more structures in the grave-field. One of them has already been mentioned, and it is 18 m long (ship 5). The second one can be estimated to have been more than 40 m long, although only a part of the east side, with 10 stones, is intact today (ship 6). The last one is not much more

than a guess. The “ship” consists of two stones, placed facing each other convexly, making up the southern point of it. This ship is located north of ship 3 and the current shafts (ship 4).

The choice of methodology before an excavation of this kind must be made with care. We used a metal detector on a part of the grave-field, before uncovering the soil. It was without success, however, resulting only in some 18th-century artefacts and a large number of modern ones. Our biggest mistake, as we see it now, is that we never sieved samples of the once ploughed soil – except for a small area mentioned above – before it was removed. For a part of the area, in between the buildings, this could very well have been done. In recent years a discovery has been made that is interesting in connection with the Färlöv ships. In 1990 a ship-setting, in the form of remains of foundations for standing stones, was found during an excavation in Linköping, Östergötland. The ship had been 50 m long and almost 12 m wide. The problems in the evaluation of the excavation are similar to those at Färlöv, due to the lack of graves, except directly south of the monument. Judging from the excavation report, the ploughed soil layer was not sieved there either (Helander & Zetterberg 1995, pp. 13 ff.). It can be suspected that the reason for this misjudgement was the same in Linköping as in Färlöv, namely, that most of the soil was

removed before it was realized what kind of structures there were. Lack of time is often the reason for mistakes in rescue excavations.

All the ship-settings described are oriented more or less exactly in N–S direction, like the ridge they are located on. The orientation is not surprising, since this was the best way of exposing them in this case. Neither is the number of monuments surprising, since we could expect this type of grave-field in Skåne generally to have suffered great damage in historic time (Carlie 1994, p. 94). Surprising, however, is the collection of many, generally large ship-settings and also one extremely large one. This gives us an interesting contribution to a discussion further on about what the scale means.

Other graves and sacrifices

The entire bone material from the excavations in 1996–98 has been analysed. Some of the material, from graves and stone foundations, has already been presented, and as indicated above many of the features examined were hard to interpret as either graves or parts of other structures. The bone material was as a whole represented by few and very small fragments from each feature, which made identification hard. In connection with the diffuse characteristics of the shallow pits with burnt bones, there

Fig. 6. Stone foundation without supporting stones, belonging to ship 2. Photo Anders Edring.





Fig. 7. The inscription on the rune-stone. Photo Evelyn Thomasson.

is the fact that several of them contained only animal bones (Arcini, in press). This phenomenon has been observed by Strömberg, who consider them, along with hearths with animal bones, as connected with burial rituals (Strömberg 1961, p. 61). This seems like a reasonable explanation for some of the pits on the Färlöv site, one of them containing dog bones, and one hearth with lots of pig (?) bones. Features of this kind numbered more than 10, excluding the finds from the stone foundations. One of them was dated to 6450 ± 75 BP (Ua 13052), well outside the expected age.

Between ship 1 and the grave circle was a line of graves, or perhaps large post-holes, oriented N-S. They contained fragments of human and animal bones, and one of them was dated to

1420 ± 70 BP (Lu 4283). A reasonable estimation of the number of actually proved graves on the grave-field is only 15 and, as we have seen, some of them contained only occasional human bones. This makes it possible that they, as well as the sacrificial pits, *could* have been results of other events by which bones from once more or less widespread cremation layers on the site were redeposited. A small melted glass bead found in one of the 17th–20th-century features indicates that this could be the case. The discussion of these problems needs much more research, preferably from better-preserved sites, and this brief presentation is merely a small contribution to the set of problems.

The rune-stone

When we followed the replanting of trees for an avenue, mentioned above, we found a rune-stone in one of the planting pits. The site is located no more than 50 m west of the major ship-setting. The stone is $2.80 \times 0.95 \times 0.45$ m large and has an inscription on one of the broad sides. Under the base of the reclining boulder was a foundation of about 1 m in diameter, filled with smaller stones, indicating the actual place where the stone had been standing. Unfortunately we were once more prevented by the regional authorities from excavating, since they demanded that it should be preserved. In my opinion this was an amazing academic somersault. How often do we have the opportunity to examine the foundation of a rune-stone? Less than once a century is my guess. The ones presumably standing on their original spot we will never be allowed to remove, and now this golden opportunity is gone.

This is not the time nor the right author to make a detailed description or interpretation of the runes on the Färlöv stone, which I leave to the experts. At the same time the rune-stone must be described, even if it is rudimentary, to enable some kind of comprehensive interpretation of the site in this work. The experts have, alas, so far not been able to give the inscription

any meaning, because the surface of the stone is very weathered. But they can tell that the runes are of the old runic alphabet, which is revealed by the A-rune and the absence of punctuation marks. The A-rune of the old runic alphabet represents the letter H in the later runic alphabet. As frequently as the sign occurs on the Färlöv stone, it is likely that it represents the sound A instead of H. This fact, in combination with the lack of punctuation and the form of some of the other runes, tells that it is from the 8th or 9th century A.D. There is an obvious possibility that the Färlöv stone should be counted among the south Scandinavian group of early rune-stones in Blekinge (Thorgunn Snædal, oral information; Moltke 1976, pp. 108 ff.).

Chronology of the grave-field

Just as in many other prehistoric grave-fields, we have few direct stratigraphic connections between different graves and other features. Because of this we can only make a very limited horizontal stratigraphy, based on the findings. To achieve some understanding of when and how the grave-field was used through the Iron Age we must compare the types of graves, the find material and the radiocarbon datings with each other.

First of all it must be explained that a majority of the features on the site are excluded from the discussion, since they are clearly from the 17th to the 20th century. Also excluded are the very early radiocarbon dates since there are some Stone Age or Bronze Age features at the site, and obviously an intrusion of older charcoal to a certain extent. In fact this shows that all the ^{14}C dates must be viewed with care. The ^{14}C analysis are afflicted with the problem of representativeness, since they give a far wider range than expected. Because of this they are presented in their entirety in Table 1.

The weapon grave is the first known feature, and it is dated to the later Roman Iron Age. One could argue that the other graves under the presumable barrow ought to be earlier, rather

Table 1. ^{14}C dates.

LuA 4282	Ship 1	1150 \pm 100 BP
Lu 4283	Line of graves	1420 \pm 70
LuA 4308	Ship 2	1250 \pm 100
Ua 13051	Grave square	8765 \pm 80
Ua 13052	Votive pit	6450 \pm 75
Ua 13053	Ship 2	1940 \pm 70

than later, than the weapon grave and the elongated grave on top of it. The latter was in any case probably made short after the weapon grave. After these comes the line of graves, or rather, the large post-holes between ship 1 and the grave circle. After, or contemporary with, these comes the rune-stone, probably from the Vendel Period, and the two ship-settings (ship 1 and 2) with ^{14}C dates (except for a very early one) to Vendel Period–Viking Age.

We can see that the excavated part of the grave-field shows greater or lesser continuity from the later Roman Iron Age until the middle of the Viking Age, a period of some 700 or 800 years. The centre of gravity seems to be in the Vendel Period and the Viking Age, judging from the ship-settings. There is however a large gap that coincides closely with the Migration Period. This gap in actual years could be explained by the intense cultivation in modern times, combined with the relatively small size of the excavated areas compared to the total extent of the grave-field.

Internal spatial conditions

It has already been made clear that the excavated areas are a small part of the Färlöv grave-field. What we can tell is that the grave-field is spread along a roughly 500 x 100 m large area of the ridge, exposed to the west. As comparison the excavated area was 2700 m² in total, around 5% of the whole grave-field, which is estimated, chiefly on the basis on the visible monuments, to have been some 40–50,000 m². Thus we have barely glimpsed what is hidden here. But our observations indicate that there are patterns of

religious and social behaviour linked with burials, such as the clear and carefully regulated pattern formed by the single, large monuments. The exception is the grave circle that was covered by ship 2. This could be taken as an argument either that the grave circle was not visible then (no barrow?), or that there was a chronological gap (carelessness?), or a desire to actually establish physical contact with this old grave.

There was a concentration of monuments in the western part of the main trench, and this must be due to the topography of the site. Here we have the absolute top of the ridge. The graves were also concentrated in this area, and clearly not placed at random. How can we interpret this further? In my opinion it is reasonable, from what we know of social organization in late Iron Age Scandinavia, to believe that different parts or monuments in the burial ground belonged to different groups in society. These groups should be understood as families or relatives, but other criteria such as sex or age could very well have been as important for the distribution of the individuals. A fact complicating reconstruction of the social pattern is of course cremation and the fact that sometimes only a small part of the burnt bones came to rest in the prehistoric grave-fields (Strömberg 1961, p. 51; Kaliff 1997, p. 119).

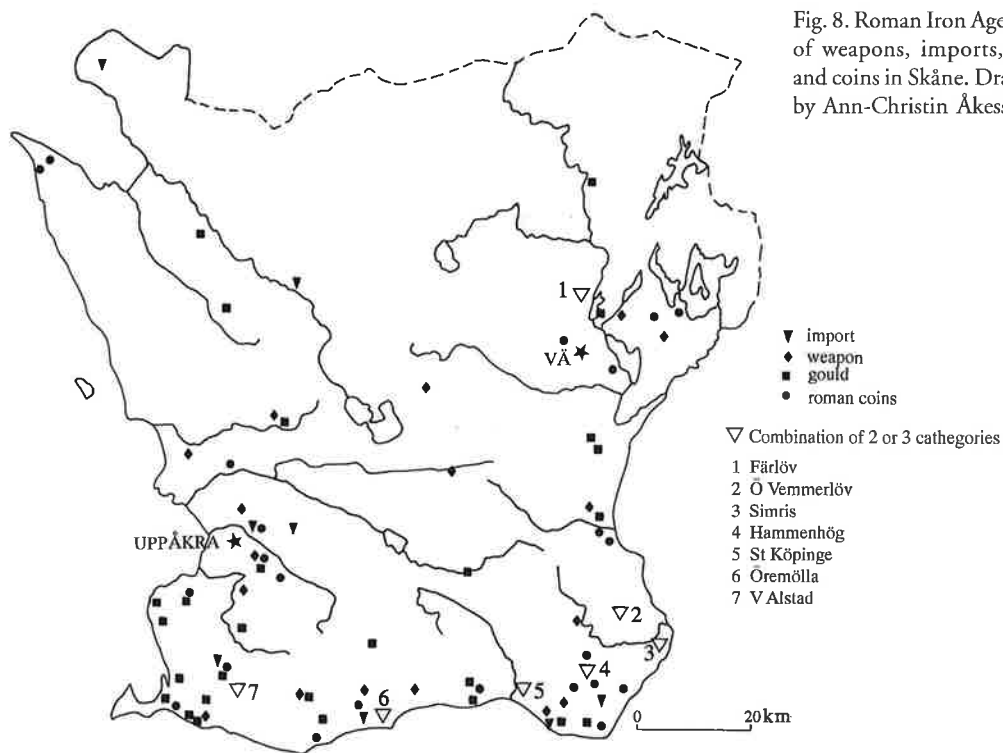
After the ships

The grave-field in Färlöv seems to have gone out of use during the 10th century AD. This was a period of state formation in Denmark and of transformation from an indigenous religion to Christianity. The only known find that connects the Iron Age grave-field and the medieval church in time and space is three clay vessels, found during gravel digging some 600 m north-east of the current excavation, and one is preserved in the Historical Museum, Lund (LUHM 16080; Carlie 1994, pp. 107, 291). The kind of vessel, with tiny knobs under the rim, is dated to the late Viking Age (10th or 11th century) and it is

very similar to the small vessels found especially in children's graves in several contemporary grave-fields in Skåne, first and foremost in Fjälkinge some 12 km east of Färlöv (Helgesson 1996, pp. 9 ff.). For this reason I believe that the vessels indicate a Viking Age grave-field (Fig. 1), the short stage between the pagan rituals and the fully established Christian beliefs and values symbolized by the church.

The stone church of Färlöv is worth a special comment in this context. It was built in the 12th century A.D. with a tower that is divided into two twin towers in the upper part. The only known parallel to it in Skåne was the twin tower of the church in the medieval town of Vå (not preserved). One could argue that the spectacular twin tower displays an ambition to still be seen in Färlöv during the early medieval period, and the connection to Vå is fascinating. But let us return to this later on.

Initially it was stated that most of the stones in the grave-field were removed between 1749 and 1820. The period coincides with the building of the farms of Araslöv manor in Färlöv parish (about 1790–1820), which as a whole were an early example of reform of the agricultural system, instigated by ambitious noblemen following the Scottish model. During this revolutionary epoch the whole structure of Iron Age and medieval land use was erased in one blow. The properties were joined to create large fields, meadows and pastures, watercourses were straightened and large areas were drained (Hansson & Trelld 1995). With written sources and old maps as background, it is obvious that the major destruction of the grave-field in Färlöv should be seen in connection with this dramatic transformation of the agrarian landscape structure. There is no doubt that the counts of Araslöv gave orders to clear away most of the standing stones, but these were probably not moved far away. Today, two of the large manor farms (Sofieberg and Gustavsfält) and the parish parsonage are still located on the ground of the grave-field. All three have brick houses and have, or have had, huge annexes built of stone.



There is still a fence in the form of a stone wall along one side of the road that cuts through the grave-field, and earlier on there was one on the other side too.

Much has been said about the graves, but we must remember that the generations of people lived somewhere too, not too far away. The Färlöv ridge widens shortly north of the grave-field to a larger plateau, in my opinion the most likely spot for the Iron Age village. This area is to a large extent built upon today and therefore hard to examine, but sooner or later there will be an opportunity to do so.

Weapons, import and gold

Since the Simris excavations of 1949–1951 and 1972 three graves with weapons and two finds of Roman imports have been found in Skåne (Stjernquist 1955, 1977; Nicklasson 1997, pp. 246 ff.; Lund Hansen 1987, pp. 449 f.), not counting the Färlöv find. The Simris grave-field is undoubtedly the best excavated and best

equipped in southern Sweden to date. It is easy to see Simris as a stronghold and even as an extraordinary exception, but we must remember that very few grave-fields from the period have been excavated at all in Skåne, especially recently, and none whatsoever as thoroughly as Simris. This gives us an unclear situation from which to draw our conclusions. To put the weapon grave from Färlöv into some form of wider context I will look at the spatial relations between different find categories from the Roman Iron Age.

Nicklasson (1997) gives us a firm basis in his catalogue of weapon graves in mainland Sweden. Imports have been examined by Ulla Lund Hansen (1987) and the gold objects have been studied by Kent Andersson (1993). The distribution of Roman coins, studied by Balling (1966) has also been included to produce a map of these categories (Fig. 8). We must also include Uppåkra and Vå in the discussion, representing high-level central places, probably as early as the Roman Iron Age (Callmer 1982, pp. 160 f.;

Stjernquist 1951, 1996, pp. 89 ff.; Larsson & Hårdh 1998, pp. 1 ff.). The map covers a period of 400 years, and we must be aware that what it shows is only a coarse picture of events put together.

Fabech has shown in a trustworthy way how we can translate find material of certain categories from the late Iron Age into a map showing the strongholds of the élite in command of the trade routes and/or the arable land, first and foremost during the Migration Period, but also in later periods (Fabech 1993, pp. 201 ff.). I believe that the regional division and centres of power, studied by Fabech and others, was a result of a process which started much earlier, and that we should be able to detect possible centres and so on by doing just about the same thing with the early Iron Age as is being done about the late Iron Age in Skåne. Restricting ourselves to one period can prevent us from seeing "the changes which had already taken place in the previous period", and from understanding that the finds are a result of a historical process, not a frozen moment of time without history or continuity (Hedeager 1992, p. 237).

As the map of the Roman Iron Age finds shows, the spread of the status finds follows Fabech's map of the Migration Period very closely. Or rather, it indicates very evidently what was to come. We can clearly observe the tendency that finds of this kind are made mainly in the plains, the hilly landscape and along major water routes. They are seldom found on the major mountain ridges or the part of the Götaland highland in the north of the region. Comparing with Strömberg's (1961) and Callmer's (1991) maps of the distribution of late Iron Age settlements and graves, we can see that the same general picture was already a fact in the Roman Iron Age. I believe that the spread of finds first of all show us the areas with the largest populations and also where cultivation has been most intense in modern time. If we develop this further and consider Fig. 8 as a reflection of where the strongholds of the élite were located, they were without doubt connected to the most

arable land in the region. In this respect much of the division of Skåne in the Iron Age into smaller areas seems to be a result of mainly geographic conditions. The continuity seen in the geographic distribution of wealth between early and late Iron Age suggests that wealth was to a large extent kept and preserved for several generations within a small portion of society (dominant groups or families).

In connection with the discussion of wealth and power, one important direction for future research could be the specific questions concerning the weapon graves. As Nicklasson has shown, there are often one weapon grave per generation in Swedish grave-fields from Roman Iron Age (Nicklasson 1997, e.g. p. 124), and this ought to be relevant for Färlöv too. Larger investigated areas within the excavated grave-fields are essential for a better understanding of various phenomena connected to them. It is argued above that a small mound with two standing stones on top of it, some 100 m southwest of the Färlöv grave, probably conceals another weapon grave. The importance of excavating this presumed grave must therefore be emphasized as an easy way to check Nicklasson's facts, and also to gain more valuable material about this specific grave-field. I for one would very much like to do it!

Ship-settings as a phenomenon

Ship-settings are an almost entirely Scandinavian form of grave monument, with some exceptions from the Baltic states and the south coast of the Baltic sea. First of all we must tell that Capelle makes it very clear that stone ships, from what we know of them from excavations, are grave monuments. The orientation is shown to vary greatly, and it is not uniform even for certain areas or periods of time. The main reason for the orientation is the topography, especially shorelines. He also distinguishes a group of large ship-settings, over 40 m, as well as very large ones measuring over 60 m. Further, it is stated that the latter group is only known from Denmark

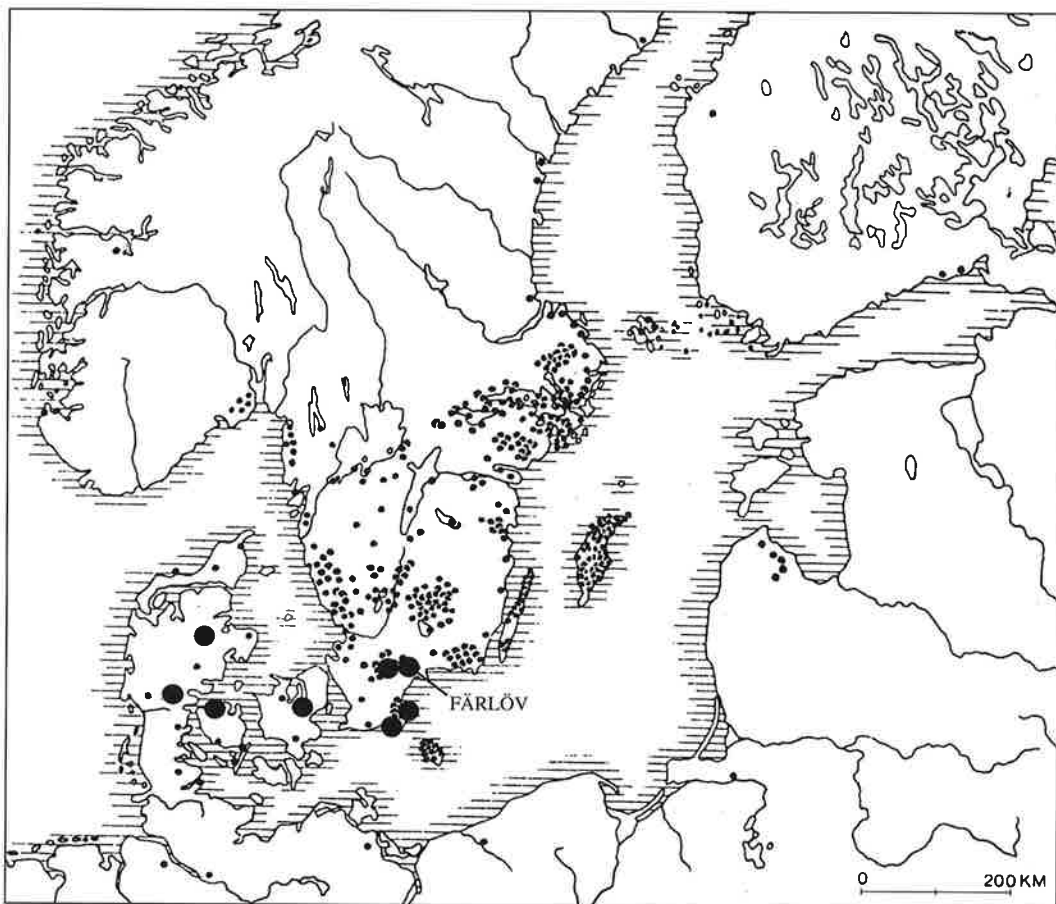


Fig. 9. Distribution of ship-settings, especially the extremely large ones. After Capelle 1986, Abb. 2 and 11.

and Skåne. The extremely large ship-settings in Skåne and Denmark are Ales Stenar (67 m), Kivik (60 m), Ljungarum (over 60 m), Jelling (150 m?), Vejerslev (about 90 m), Lejre (about 80 m) and Glavendrup (60 m) (Capelle 1986, pp. 8, 14, 16, 34, 62, Abb. 2, 11.). The important excavations at Vätteryd in central Skåne clearly showed the importance of thorough examination of ship-settings, since the excavated ones, and in fact a great deal of the whole grave-field, were covered by a cremation layer with spread material of burnt human and animal bones. The cremation layers and the graves on the site could (collectively) be dated within the time span from the Migration Period until the Viking age. In Strömberg's view, likewise, the

ship-settings are primarily graves, but she has on several occasions discussed complementary or alternative explanations for the phenomenon (Strömberg 1961, pp. 50 ff.).

There have been many suggestions for the reason behind this kind of grave monument. The most common must be that the ship was intended for the journey to the other side, but there have also been several alternative suggestions. Particularly interesting are the discussions of what the ship-settings could represent as social phenomena with regard to purely profane factors, first of all the status of trade and shipping in the late Iron Age. There have been clear spatial connections drawn in central Sweden between ship-settings and rune-stones mention-

ing people who had travelled abroad (Andersson 1994, p. 6, and literature recorded there). Another proposal, for inland conditions, is that the ships could have been built by wealthy farmers or great men, in conformity with prevailing custom (Carlie 1994, p. 185). Capelle argues that the extremely large ship-settings should not, in such large number as is the case, appear in the inland, if they were monuments to great seafarers (Capelle 1986, p. 16). Strömberg, finally, asserts that large ship-settings should be placed singly if we are to discuss them in terms of a territory's dominion in an area (Strömberg 1997, p. 19).

As a whole the Färlöv grave site is reminiscent of that of Lejre in several ways. Lejre has a good part of a ship-setting that is about 70 m long (my estimation), and there were at least three more, all with lengths of 40–50 m. The ship-settings at Lejre are located on a grave-field (partially excavated) that contained one large mound with a cremation layer dated to the Vendel Period, four (perhaps six) cremation graves and 49 inhumation graves dated to the Viking Age (Wulff Andersen 1995, pp. 9 f., 91 ff.). What do Lejre and Färlöv, and evidently a good many other grave-fields, represent? My conclusion is definitive. There were clear reasons for the people in Scandinavia to build the ship-settings. Some clearly felt a need to make them more than ordinarily big, and for some reason this tendency was strongest in Denmark. The relationship between the ships of ordinary size and the big one/s in a grave-field was not necessarily different in Denmark than elsewhere. On the other hand, it seems as if part of the population deliberately marked its dominance over the rest, and consequently that some territories marked their dominance in an area. Of course we cannot be certain that this reflects the true picture, understood and accepted by their age, and certainly not the dynamics of the political landscape in the late Iron Age. But it ought to reflect a wish to be seen, by gods or men, or both. To me it is obvious that Färlöv was an important place during the Iron Age, not as a

centre of interregional or regional importance, but as the home village of a great man, or rather a family, perhaps with a function as a stronghold in connection with the rulers of Västergötland. I also believe that the material show us that the mighty people of Färlöv kept their role of importance for a long period of time, probably into the middle ages as masters of the castle of Färlövsholm, and later as counts of Araslöv manor.

Summary and final remarks

The Färlöv grave-field has proved to hide very important information about the Iron Age communities in southern Scandinavia. It was examined over a period of three years in quite unfavourable conditions. The results were nevertheless far beyond our expectations. The excavated parts of the grave-field contained remains of one grave monument with a weapon grave from the Roman Iron Age at its centre, three ship-settings of about 40, 50 and 80 m in length, the latter the longest known stone ship in Sweden, one rune-stone and a number of cremation graves and sacrificial deposits. The grave-field in Färlöv was interpreted as having a continuity from the Roman Iron Age until the Viking Age. The evidence for continuity throughout most of the Iron Age is not indisputable, but the lack of years in the ^{14}C analyses is, in my opinion, sufficiently covered by the small size of the excavated areas compared to the total size of the grave-field, and the fact that the site has been intensively cultivated in modern times. The grave-field consists of at least three more ship-settings and a barrow, which I believe hides another weapon grave. It has been made clear that the excavated part of the grave-field belonged to an influential group of people, probably relatives, who made their importance visible even in death. Their position in the power systems of the Iron Age communities in Skåne–Denmark has also been evaluated, although the conclusions are still rather vague. I would need more space to make any further discussion on the topic, and besides we need more and larger

excavations to go ahead on the subject. There has been very little growth in actual new grave material, interesting in a discussion concerning the development and transformation of the ruling class and the hierarchy of the Iron Age communities in the area, despite the immense amount of archaeological excavations carried out in Skåne in the last 20 years.

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