

# Village Dynamics and a Deserted Medieval Farmstead

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## Abstract

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This article discusses the dynamics of village borders based on the results from an excavation in 2001 of a high medieval farmstead that was found just outside the village of Västra Klagstorp in south-western Scania. The localization and dating of the farmstead was viewed as an anomaly in comparison with the models used to explain village formation in southern Scandinavia. The farmstead is discussed in relation to topographic features, the spatial organization of the farmstead itself and its relations to later land survey maps. Rather than dismissing the existing models, the results of the excavation stress that the variation in village formation processes is wider and it continues for a longer period of time.

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## Introduction

Around the city of Malmö in the southern Swedish region of Scania there are extensive farmlands and a lot of villages with roots in medieval times. One of them is the village of Västra Klagstorp, about 10 km south of Malmö, which has lost a great deal of its rural setting due to small houses built primarily from the 1970s onward. The planning of the roads though, dates back to at least the 18th century and together with a few farmsteads and the church in the centre, it still reminds us that this is the place of a medieval village. During a few cold and rainy months in the autumn and winter of 2001 I supervised an excavation in the southern part of the historically known village

site. With this excavation as a starting point I intend to discuss the spatial dimensions of the village formation process and how the structure of the village changed over time. To start with I will give a short introduction to the history of the village.

## The village of Västra Klagstorp

*Clauxthorp* is first mentioned in 1369. It can be etymologically derived from the Old Danish name *Klakker*, a name that ceased to be used during the Viking Age, and the suffix *-torp* meaning new settlement/dispersed settlement

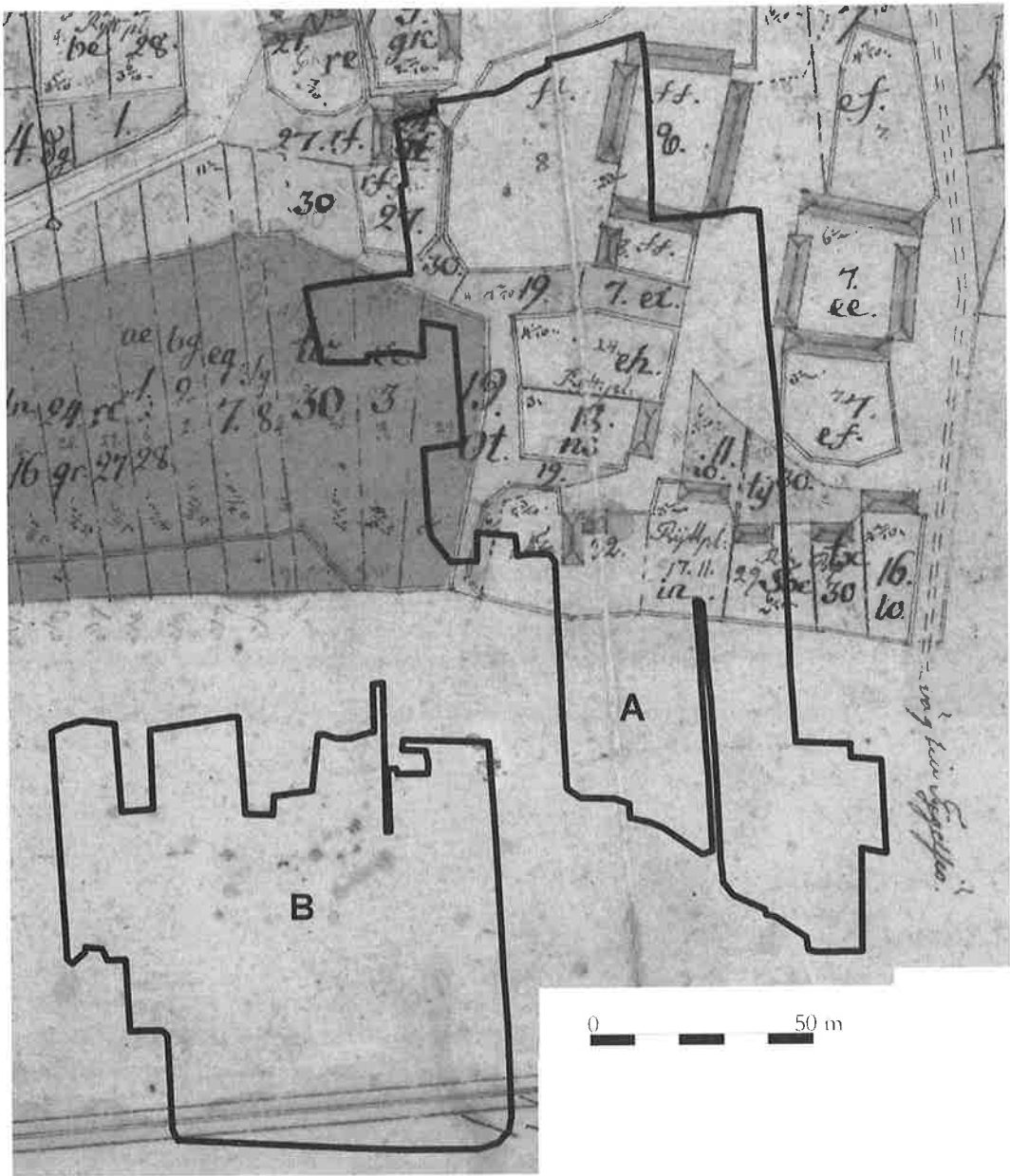


Fig. 1. The two excavation areas superimposed on the land survey map from 1788.

(Ingers 1978). The prefix *Västra* was added in 1885 to distinguish it from its namesake north of Trelleborg.

The parish is elongated (7.5 x 1.5 km) in an east–west direction beginning at the Öresund.

Starting in the coastal meadows the land rises evenly and we find the village situated about 5 km from the shore. Until the late 19th century the village was the only settlement in the parish and it had a small harbour called

*Hjulhamn* situated approximately where Klagshamn is today. The harbour is mentioned during the 16–17th century, and in a letter from King Christian II in 1522 he tried to close down the harbour to channel trade from the small harbours of the farmers and aristocracy towards the market towns. He did not succeed, however (Lundblad *et al.* 1976; Reisnert 1984).

In 1569 there were 25 households paying tithes, and at least 6 of them were so-called *gatehus*, which are smaller cottages situated on common or private landowners' land and having little or no arable land of their own. In 1788 there was 17 farmsteads and 15 *gatehus*. It was considered a fairly normal sized village in an area in which villages were the norm and single farms were scarce. Almost all of the land was cultivated, leaving only little, if any, land for pasture and woods. A consequence of this was a concentration on grain cultivation instead of animal husbandry (Lundblad *et al.* 1976; Riddersporre 2003).

The archaeological evidence suggests that the village was continuously inhabited since the 11th century. The early medieval finds consists of partly excavated sunken-floored huts, a so-called Trelleborg house and stray finds of Baltic ware and an ornate piece of stirrup fitting (Strömberg 1964; Steineke 2000, Forsblad 2003). A radiocarbon dating of macrofossil material to 680–880 AD and a bird-shaped brooch dated to 650–725 AD indicate earlier activities in the vicinity which may, or may not, be of settlement character (Hårdh 1984; Skog 2004). The findings give but a glimpse of the early history of the village.

The Romanesque stone church was probably built during the second half of the 12th century. The original church had a nave, chancel and a rounded apse, and the broad western tower was added in the 14th century (Andersson 1955). The medieval and historical period is visible only through odd findings of

glazed earthenware and foundation stones from buildings identified in the 1788 map, found in connection with a few small cable trenches. (Persson manuscript; Serlander 2004).

## The excavation in 2001

The excavation covered about 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> and was, according to the historical maps, situated in the southern part of the village and its nearby fields and low-lying meadows. The investigations were concentrated in two main areas (Fig. 1.). In area A we found parts of two farmsteads from the medieval and historical period and five *gatehus*. Between these farmsteads and *gatehus* we found lots of ditches and clay pits covering almost all of the ground. It was possible to divide the ditches into several groups, mainly consisting of ditches marking different borders between farmsteads and houses and also ditches dividing and draining the arable fields. A bundle of ditches, about 15 m wide, running in an east–west direction, marked the village boundary, as it can be seen on the 1788 land survey map.

The excavation in area A focused on two main problems. The first concerned the socio-economic relationship between the farmsteads and the *gatehus*, since it was possible for us to study consumption patterns using archaeological as well as written sources from the 17th century onwards.

The second area of interest was the changing of borders and spatial development of the village. As the excavation was localized on the outskirts of the village, regressions and expansions are more easily visible than in the more densely and continuously populated central parts of the village. Also the *gatehus* in this area are a new addition to the village in the 16th century, marking a change in the way in which the village was spatial and socio-economically organized. These two questions and more will be discussed in a forthcoming

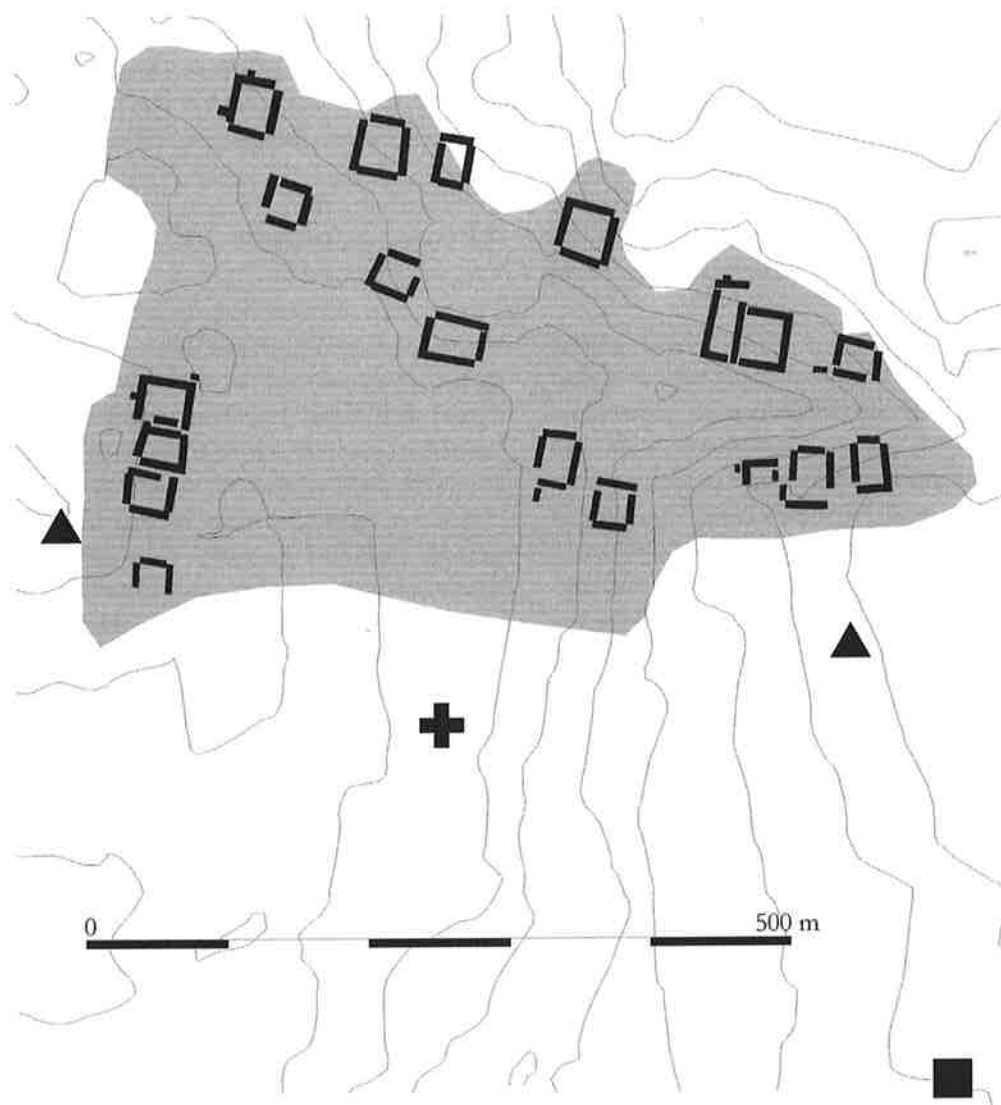


Fig. 2. Settlements and topography in the vicinity of Västra Klagstorp. The cross marks the location of the high medieval farmstead, triangles mark Late Viking Age settlements and the square marks the Early Viking Age settlement. The village extent as seen on the 1788 map is hatched. The distance between the elevation lines is 1 m.

report, but in this article I will focus on the surprising findings in area B.

#### *Area B*

Outside the village boundaries we excavated a quite well defined area with wells, pits, ditches, hearths and post-holes some of which made

up the remnants of houses. The structures could be roughly dated to the period 1050–1400 AD and probably narrowed down to about 1100–1350 AD, which will be discussed further later on. This high medieval settlement consisted of five houses which could be divided into two phases. The main house in the oldest

phase had curved walls which also supported the roof. There was also a barn placed at right angles to the house. Together they formed a farmyard facing north-west towards the village. Radiocarbon datings from the two houses range between 1030 and 1250 AD, and a typological dating of the main house would be 1050–1275 AD (Skog 2004; Skov 1992:31 f.).

The main house of the second phase intersects its predecessor and has a slightly different angle. Ditches lead away from the house to the east and west and turn northwards. The outhouses are placed to the south, forming a possible yard. The eastern outhouse has a radiocarbon dating to AD 1150–1280 (Skog 2004) and the pottery found in the main building is typologically dated to AD 1250–1350. To the south of the buildings was an area with a few pits, hearths and wells, probably connected to the second phase of habitation.

## Thoughts concerning a medieval farmstead

The farmstead in area B is placed outside the later village boundaries and it existed during a rather short period of time in the Early and High Middle Ages. The organization of settlement structure in south-west Scania during the Middle Ages was probably dominated by the village. At least during the 17th century, the villages predominated totally. A few single farms existed in the south-west part of Scania but they were much more common in the north-east (Dahl 1942). Considering its location on the plains south of Malmö, it would be unusual to see a farmstead outside the village boundaries, and this might be worth an explanation.

On the other hand, archaeological excavations during the last 20 years have shown that it is not at all uncommon to find dispersed Viking Age and early medieval settlements in

the vicinity of the medieval village. The development of these settlements into regulated medieval villages, their origin and purpose, have been studied in great detail during the last few years. Most agree that during the 12th and early 13th century a development leading towards more regulated villages took place, influenced mainly by the church and the king and also connected to more efficient farming techniques and organization which might have been necessitated by demographic factors. During this period the individual farmsteads moved closer to the village centre and to roughly the places that are later marked on the historical maps. In connection with this it was common to dig ditches as markers of the new boundaries and the new way of ownership and organization. (For a more detailed discussion of this matter see for example: Svart Kristiansen 1995; Carelli 2001; Olsson & Thomasson 2001; Schmidt Sabo 2001.) As stated above, it is not odd that the farmstead in question was founded outside what was to become the village of Västra Klagstorp. The thing to consider is why it was not incorporated or moved into the village until the 14th century.

During the excavation we found the farmstead and its relation to the village rather complicated. It might be possible to view the farmstead as something in between a single farm and a regular part of the village. Mats Riddersporre has presented a model where the village can be seen as an *live together/work together* organization of the landscape and the settlement as a contrast to the single farm as *live apart/work apart*. He suggest that it is also possible to distinguish between other forms of organization of landscape and settlement where *live together/work apart* and *live apart/work together* would be possible solutions, which he shows with examples from south and central Sweden (Riddersporre 1999). The different ways of organization are of course dependent on topography, economic factors as well as social and political

organization, and changes in these factors. This model might be applicable when discussing this particular farmstead since it does not focus on the farm itself but on the relationship between farmsteads and the organization of the settlement as a whole. And it might also have wider implications.

The way settlement and landscape are spatially and socially organized affects the socio-economic status of their users and thereby influences the material culture, making it possible to study the question archaeologically. I will try to discuss the farmstead based on topographical aspects, artefacts and ecofacts from the excavation

and settlement organization, and finally connect it with the historical maps. By doing so I hope to be able to explain what originally struck me as a little odd concerning the farmstead's localization and its duration over time.

*Topography, settlements and borders*

The surrounding plains have small but important differences in altitude constituting, among other things, meadows and wetlands in the low areas and well-drained areas suitable for fields and habitation. The farmstead is situated on a small elevation separated from

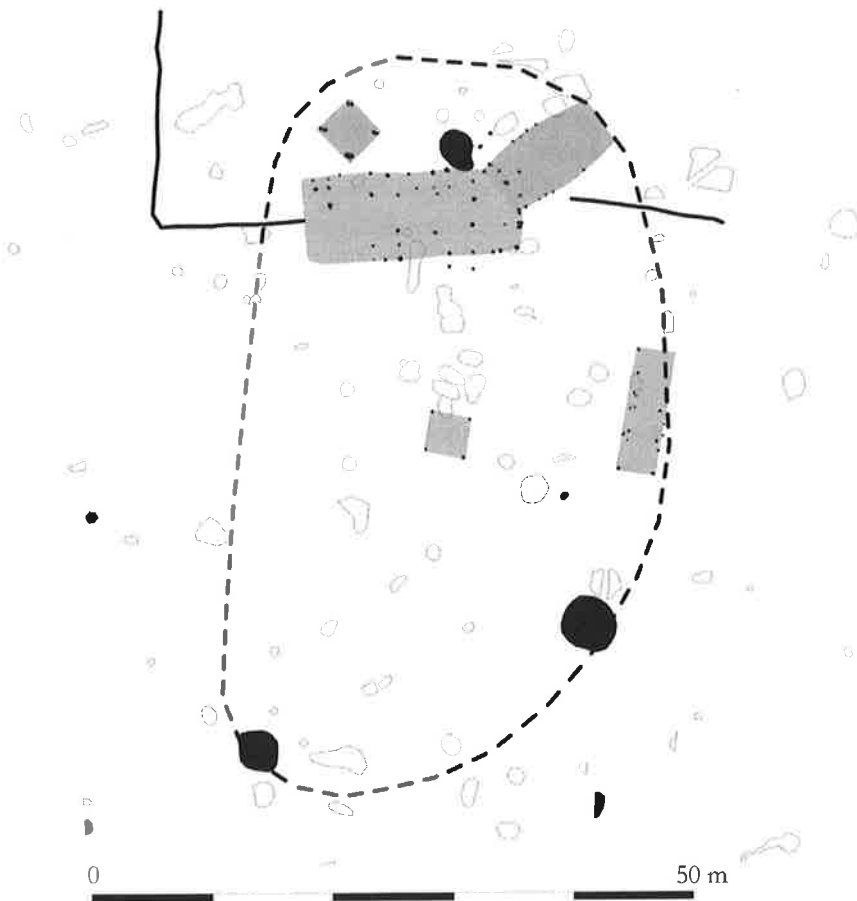


Fig. 3. The farmstead in area B. The houses in the earliest phase are hatched with lines and in the later phase shaded with dots. Wells and hearths are solid black, as are the ditches in the second phase. The dotted line marks a change in the moraine.

the village by a meadow in a small hollow in which there used to be a brook leading to the sea. The underlying moraine mainly consists of clay, but marking the borders of the settlement there are noticeably more stones and gravel. Around this change in the moraine it is easier to reach groundwater level, and all of the settlement's three wells are located around this shift. The location gives the farmstead access to both fields and meadows at a close distance, and the geological features seem to have partly determined the shape and location of the settlement.

Other Late Viking Age and early medieval farmsteads in the close vicinity of Västra Klagstorp have similar locations just outside the later village border, as can be seen in fig. 2. The oldest is dated to 700–900 AD and consisted of four long-houses divided into two phases. The others are mentioned above and are both located close to the village; they consist of sunken-floored huts in both cases, and a Trelleborg house in the western settlement. The dating to the 11th century is based on house typology, artefacts and the presence of Baltic ware. All three of these settlements exist for a limited period of time and were all abandoned or moved during the 10th–12th centuries (Strömberg 1964; Forsblad 2003; F. Grehn, personal communication). At least the two Late Viking Age settlements seem to conform well to the pattern of village regulation outlined in the previous chapter. If this pattern was adopted by the other farmsteads in the village, why did they not all move? Is this to be interpreted as suggesting that the farm south of the village border did not belong to the village in a structural sense? And if it did, how are we to explain the differences in the use and organization of land?

The location outside a village and close to borders, like the parish border in this case, sometimes indicates a socially peripheral as well as geographical status. During later

historical periods these locations were often inhabited by landless artisans and farm-workers (Serlander 2001; Svensson 2002). On the other hand, south-west Scania was densely populated and there was an average of 2.5 km between the villages, making it hard to be that peripheral, at least in a geographical sense. Social dividers do not require the same distances, however, making it quite possible to regard the farmstead as outside the village in a social as well as a geographical sense. To determine whether this is the case we have to consider other factors as well.

#### *Houses and settlement structure*

A closer look at the spatial organization of the farmstead and its buildings reveals a few interesting features. In the oldest phase, starting in the mid-11th century, the main building and the barn were at right angles and the yard was facing the village. All of the posts in the barn had been replaced, showing continuity in the settlement for at least 50 years, assuming that earth-dug posts lasted for about 30 years. There was a well just outside the entrance of the main building but it is not possible to connect any other features securely to this phase.

The next phase shows a change in the overall direction of the farmstead with the barn and another building south of the main building forming a small yard. Two ditches that connect to the main building might enclose a rectangular area to the north of the building. The new main building is oriented strictly east–west and intersects the old main building and the well. A new well was dug far to the south of the houses, probably caused by the geological factors mentioned above. This well had boarding made out of reused ship planking. The tree could be dendrochronologically dated, with a *terminus post quem* at AD 1164. We could suppose that the ship was used for at least 30 years before ending up as boarding, probably

dating the well to the early 13th century. Between the well and the buildings was an area with pits and hearths which seems to have been used on an irregular basis. In the outskirts of this area are four hearths forming a rectangle of roughly 40x25 m and perhaps in some way

defining the inhabited ground. The settlement ended during the 14th century. The main building was destroyed by a fire, of which traces can be seen in the nearby pits and ditches, visible as layers of charcoal and daub.

This change between the two phases in



Fig. 4. A retrogressive analysis of the land survey map from 1788 showing the individual medieval fields with the fields owned by farm 19 marked. Farmstead 19 is marked in black and the excavated farmstead in area B is marked with a cross. The meadows are hatched.



settlement probably took place in the early 13th century. Chronologically this coincides with the general change in settlement organization in south-west Scania, as mentioned above. The regulation of the village that caused the other farms to change their location in relation to the village border, in this case arranged the farmstead on roughly the same spot as earlier but in a different manner. This indicates that the farmstead was indeed part of the larger settlement organization connected to the village and probably an integral part of the village rather than a single farm. The social status of the farm is not described by this, however; we have to look at the material culture as well.

#### *Artefacts and ecofacts*

During the excavation we collected a total of 8.6 kg of artefacts from area B. That is not a lot, and the interpretations have to be sometimes vague and the margin of error considerable. A few things can nevertheless be said, and I think they are quite important in this case.

The pottery consists of red and black earthenware dated to the period 1250–1350. (It is worth noting that we have not found any Baltic ware at all, making a dating to the early 11th century quite improbable.) Pitchers and jars were the most common vessels. Other artefacts are a couple of knives, whetstones, combs, a few dress ornaments in bronze, and a lot of nails. The ship boarding in the well is unusual but not surprising considering the harbour in the parish. It might also be considered that building material such as timber was scarce and they probably would have used all available resources or even bought the ship planking as timber.

The animal bones are from horse, cow, pig, sheep or goat, dog, cat, goose, pike, cod, herring and flounder. There are slightly fewer horse bones and slightly more fish bones on this farmstead than what we have found on

the other side of the village border, but the difference could not be described as statistically significant (Nilsson 2003). Analyses of pollen and macrofossils show the presence of open fields with barley, wheat and oat as well as pastures, but not too many bushes and trees. Peas, hop and cabbage were also found (Gustafsson 2003, Björkman & Sköld 2004).

Together the material gives an impression of a quite ordinary high medieval farmstead in south-west Scania, neither especially poor nor rich. Thus the location probably does not indicate a different social or economic standard from the other farmsteads in the village. Perhaps the location is not peripheral at all?

#### *Historical maps, ditches and meadows*

In 1788 a survey was made of Västra Klagstorp village and parish. It is very detailed concerning land division and the location of the buildings but unfortunately the accompanying description did not include names of the individual fields (Lantmäteriet i Malmö, V. Klagstorp 4). It is possible by retrogressive analysis of the map (made by Mats Riddersporre) to locate the individual medieval fields situated in the village vicinity. As can be seen in figure 4, the farmstead is located in a large field, a possible *toft*, belonging to farmstead number 19. The farm itself is not placed adjacent to the field, which was common, but inside the village just beside the church. Also visible in the figure is the meadows separating the farmstead from the village proper.

A closer look at the specific area of the farmstead (Fig. 5) reveals that the older phase of the settlement is arranged parallel to the border between meadows and fields in the north-west, indicating that this border has a considerable age which might go back to the 11th–12th century.

The settlement during the second phase is neatly placed between the border of the next field in the east and the meadows to the west, as marked by the ditches and on the 1788 map

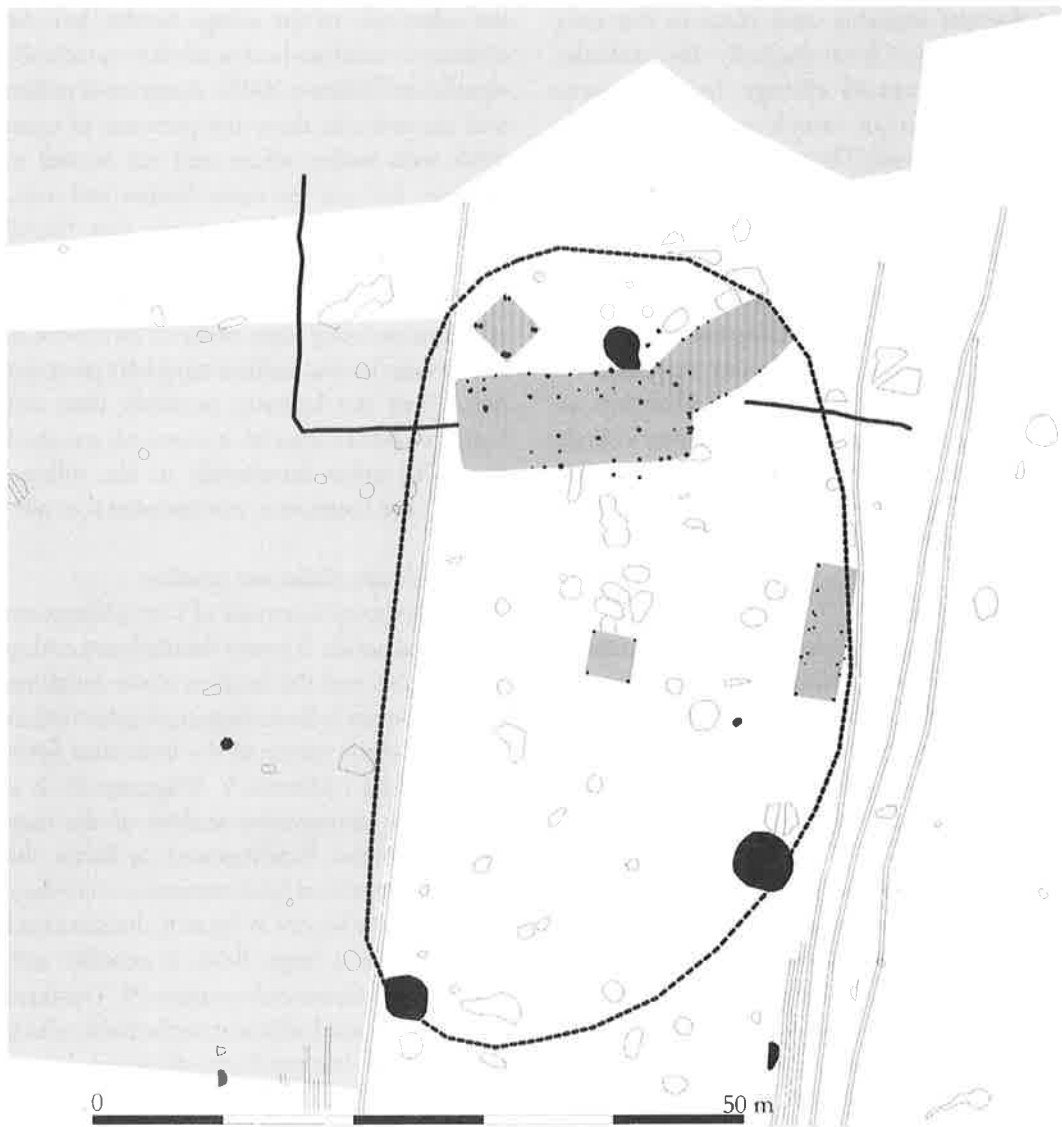


Fig. 5. The farmstead in area B and its relation to later ditches, marked by double lines and meadows. The houses in the earliest phase is hatched with lines and the later phase is hatched with dots. Wells and hearths are solid black, as are the ditches in the second phase. The dotted line marks a change in the moraine.

which also was found during the archaeological excavation. The ditches running north–south are stratigraphically younger than the settlement but they seem to define approximately the same area even though the buildings

were gone. This shows a possible continuity in the way land was defined and owned, probably at least from the 13th century onwards.

## Tying it all together

During the excavation we thought of the farmstead south of the village as an anomaly. The dating to high medieval times, its location outside the village, the structures of the houses and remnants of a rather big boat all seemed rather out of place. When I was working on this article I wanted to study the relationship of the farmstead to the village and the reasons behind its original location and later abandonment. Taking together the results from the archaeological excavation, topographic features and land survey maps from the 18th century, the anomalies did not seem so large, and it seems possible to arrange the results within a wider frame of understanding. Within this frame, however, there is still considerable variation but I think it is possible to point to a few plausible explanations.

I will take the land survey map from 1788 as a starting point. As mentioned above it is possible to reconstruct a few traits that probably date back to the Early Middle Ages. At least in the centrally located arable land the division between fields and meadows as well as the division between the individual farmstead is established in connection with the early regulation of the village and its surrounding land. In this central area the dividing borders can still be seen in the early maps, thereby showing continuity in the way land was organized and owned. In 1788 the fields in which we find the farmstead are owned by farm 19, a number given at the time of land survey. Since the land division was established already in the Early Middle Ages it seems highly likely that the farmstead that was moved or abandoned in the 14th century is actually the owner of the same land as the one to be established in the location marked on the map anytime between the 14th and 18th century. The question whether the farmstead was moved in the 14th century or simply deserted cannot be answered without archaeological

excavations on the new location.

The amount of deserted farms and villages during the late medieval agrarian crises was fairly low in south-west Scania compared to other parts of Sweden and Denmark. It reached about 10%, but considering the status as a central agrarian area it is still a remarkable loss of settlements could not be solved by demographic movement from less productive areas. It was not at all uncommon that fields and meadows belonging to abandoned farms were cultivated by neighbouring farms, even if there were no buildings or inhabitants on the actual farmstead, and thereby they were not seen as deserted. An example of this is farmstead 8, which was partly excavated in area A (Fig. 1), and which we know was populated in the early 16th century, but in the late 17th century it is mentioned that it had not been inhabited within living memory; its fields were then tilled by farm 7 (Skansjö 1983; Riddersporre 1995; Reuterswärd 2004). We do not know how long, if ever, farmstead 19 was deserted before it was rebuilt, but it is possible that the farmstead was deserted for quite some time before it was established on its new location and we cannot be sure that it really is an effect of the agrarian crisis, although it seems highly likely. I would suggest, though, that it was deserted for a rather long period of time and the reason for this is the relation of the farmstead to the village border.

The artefacts and the ecofacts as well as the spatial organization of the farmstead, as mentioned before, give an impression of a quite ordinary high medieval farm which was probably well integrated in the village socially and economically. The regulation of the farmstead and probably the village in the early 13th century concerned the buildings and probably the *toft* but it did not include moving it closer to the village street and the place known from the land survey maps. It does not, however, seem reasonable to speak of a peripheral location, neither socially nor

perhaps even spatially. After all, the distance is not that great. But the relationship with the village border is important and the location outside the later village border must be explained in another way.

The ditches marking the border of the village cannot be dated with certainty but the finds indicate a dating after the 16th century. We cannot know whether this means that the border was established at that time or if the ditches were a new way of marking the border that had previously been marked in another way. It is possible, however, that the establishment of the *gatehus* at the time also meant a change in the village border. An older border might have had a different direction and it is quite possible that the farmstead was then included. In explaining the farmstead's location outside the 18th-century village border and its later relocation in the centre of the village, assuming that it is actually the same farm and that it was indeed an integrated part of the village already when it was founded in the Early Middle Ages, we must assume that the village border was changed and redefined, perhaps many times in the lifetime of the village.

In the light of what I have written, perhaps the questions posed during the excavation were put the wrong way. The investigated farmstead was quite normal and integrated in the village, but my thoughts about the medieval village were too much influenced by the 18th-century map, leading me to assume wrongly that the village occupied roughly the same area from the 12th century onwards. Spanning the time from the 11th to the 19th century, there were a great many changes in the way the village of Västra Klagstorp was defined, most of this lost for us today, but combining archaeology and geography suggests that village formation was a complex process that continued over a long period, perhaps as long as the village existed.

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