

The Village of Hötöfta and its Use of the Landscape

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Abstract

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Since the excavations led by the author were carried out at the settlement at Hötöfta in connection with gravel extraction, the complex and the rich find material has been described and discussed in many papers. The intense analyses of the pottery are a considerable part. The aim of this paper is to summarize research about the settlement and present the result: the excavations and the problems, the analyses, glimpses of how the settlements of the village were organized, its adaptation in the landscape and development from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages. The historical geographical analyses by Mats Riddersporre, with the finding that Hötöfta developed to a manor-in-the-village, are very important. The rather high status of Hötöfta does not mean, however, that it had a special connection to Uppåkra, even if we have to reckon with good connections by means of the road.

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Introduction

The problems of this paper concern the development of the Iron Age settlement of Hötöfta according to the conditions dictated by the landscape. It is here called a village, situated about 10 kilometres from the west coast of Scania (Stjernquist 1998b, Fig. 1). A small stream, Pileån, passes north of the village meandering towards the coast, flowing past Hököpinge, one of the *-köping* villages of Scania. An old road running from Lund passes Hököpinge on its way to Trelleborg on the south coast.

The definition of a village is discussed by many scholars. An old one was written by Sigurd Erixon in 1960 concerning Swedish villages without systematic organization: “A number of farms situated so near each other that their cultivated area or grounds touch each other or are mixed.” Another is by Ulf Sporrang in Nationalencyklopedin (NE) in

1990, namely “two or more farms – previously stationary and assessed working units in agriculture – with defined lands” (translation by the author). The difference between the two definitions is not very great. One question that has been raised is whether there must be more than two farms. It is difficult to know the number of farms in a settlement in the case of prehistoric sites which are very often damaged and incomplete.

The settlements at Hötöfta

In Hötöfta there were several ridges of gravel. Gravel extraction took place during the 1960s and 1970s, revealing prehistoric settlements. Investigations led by the author were carried out in connection with the gravel extraction. Settlement sites dating from the Late Bronze Age were excavated and analysed (Stjernquist 1969a). Iron Age settlements were also inves-

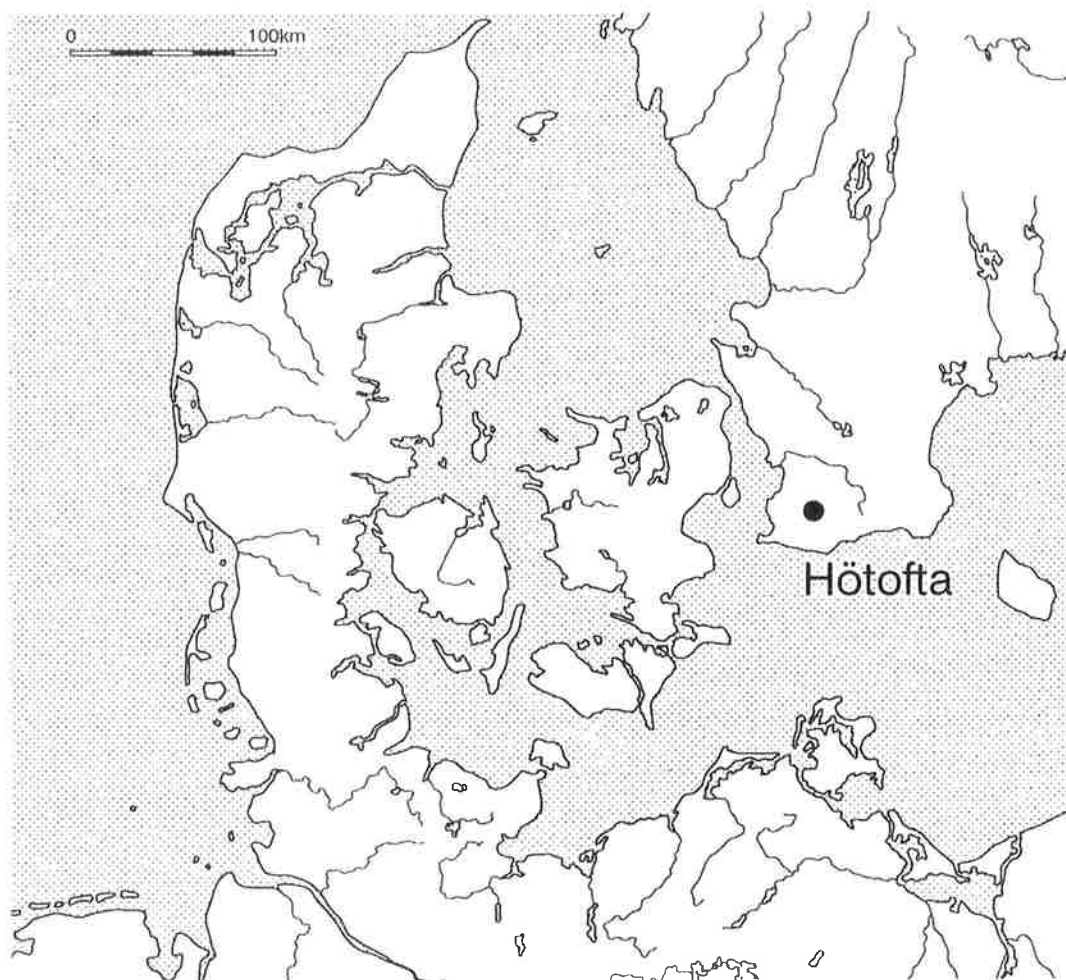


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Hötofta.

tigated at several locations (Map in Fig. 1). Remains of settlements dating from the end of the pre-Roman Iron Age and/or the beginning of the Roman Iron Age at Hötofta 18:3 (map no. 5).

Remains of settlements dating from the Migration and Vendel periods at Hötofta 18:2 and 18:4 (map no. 1).

Remains of settlements dating from the Viking Age at Hötofta 18:3, 2:1 and 4:1 (map nos. 4, 2 and 7).

a grave dating from the Late Roman Iron Age (map no. 8).

There are also traces of pit-houses (patches

with very rich vegetation) at Hötofta 18:3 which have not been excavated and as a consequence are not dated (map no. 6).

The different complexes have been discussed in some papers (Stjernquist 1969 a-b; 1998 a-b). In this connection they will be taken up once more because of the interesting results of analyses of their development.

In the years 1967–68 occupation layers and remains of five house foundations dating from the time about the Birth of Christ and the beginning of the Roman Iron Age were excavated at the farm 18:3 (Stjernquist 1969b). They were all of the long-house type of dwell-

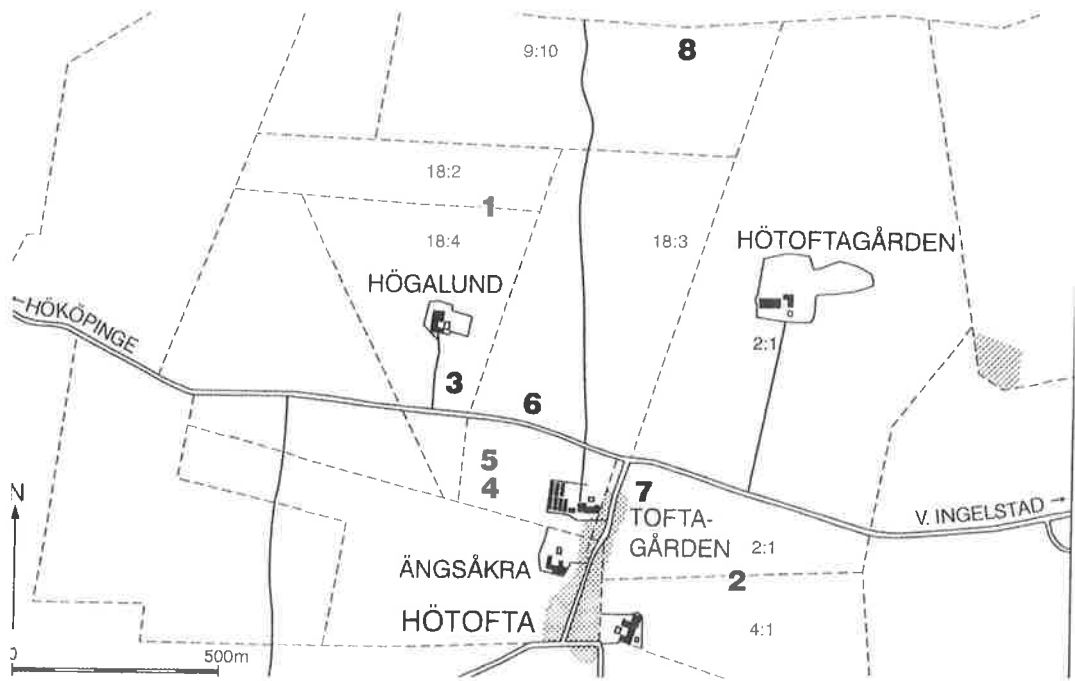


Fig. 2. Map of the village of Hötöfta in Scania with find places nos. 1-8.

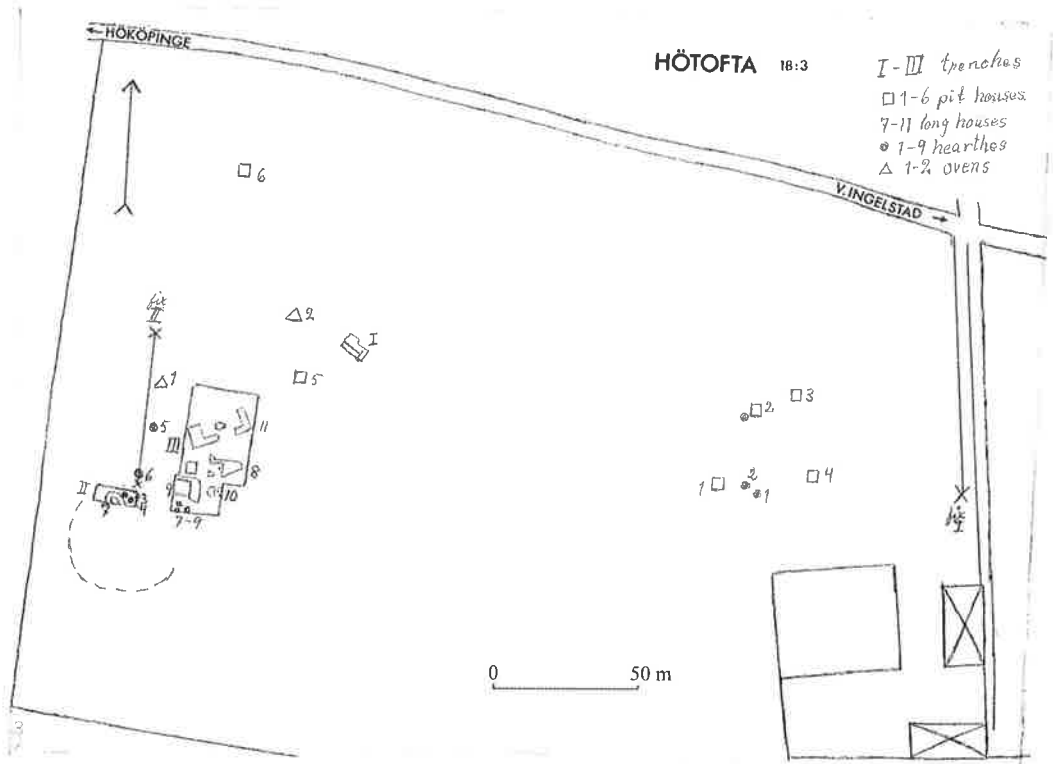


Fig. 3. Key map of the excavated features of Hötöfta.

ings, with two rows of post-holes inside the foundation. The walls, about 1 m wide, were of wattle and daub with a reinforcement of stone and earth at the base. Traces of white colour suggest lime-washing on the inside of the wall. There were occasional patches of stone paving around the foundations. The best preserved, house 8, had a length of 10 metres and a width of 4.5 metres. Traces of a hearth were documented in the eastern part of the foundation. Stone paving in the middle of the wall suggests an entrance there (key map Fig. 2).

Remains of four other houses of the same kind were documented and partly excavated. One of these houses had clear wall trenches with post-holes and a pot with animal bones as an offering in one of them (Figs. 3–4). Pottery vessels as offerings are not unusual. They are known from several settlement sites (Capelle 1987; Carlie 2004). Abundant finds of bones of domestic animals show that a population of an agricultural community lived there. The bones from the settlement have been analysed by Johannes Lepiksaar, Ove Persson and Lena Nilsson. The results have not been printed but are available in the archives of the Department of Archaeology. They are discussed by Lena Nilsson in the papers from 2001 and 2003.

The dating of the features was done with the aid of pottery, which reveals a rich variety in decoration and thickened and faceted rims. There are also sherds of pedestal vessels. The pottery has been discussed by Liversage in connection with the material from Denmark and placed in his Nissehøj phase (Liversage 1980) dating from about the Birth of Christ and the beginning of the Roman Iron Age. But the problems concerning this type of pottery are not solved.

The dating is confirmed by some ¹⁴C analyses. For house foundation no. 7, located in trench II, they give cal. AD 43–231 (two sigma) (Lu 3805) and for house foundation no.

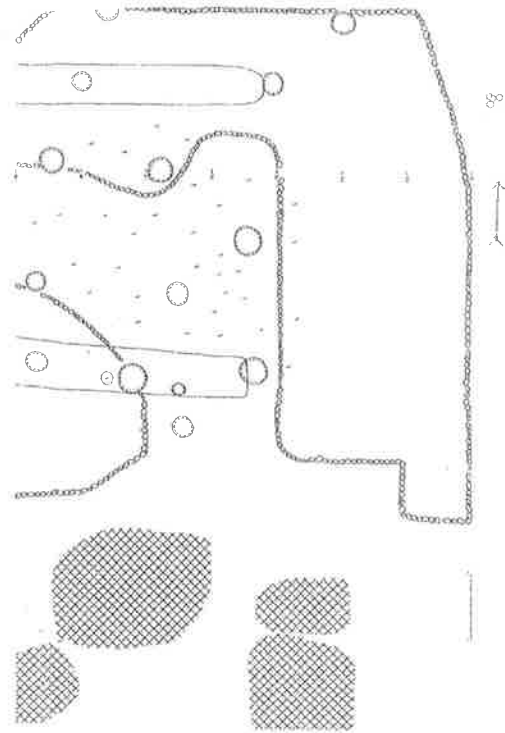


Fig. 4. Part of house foundation no. 9 with wall trenches and post-holes. Stone paving is marked with a single row of stones.

8 in trench III cal. AD 79–391 (two sigma) (Lu 3804). There is also hearth 3 in trench II with dating cal. BC 115 – AD 136 (two sigma) (Lu 3810) and oven 1 with dating cal. BC 175 – AD 121 (two sigma) (Lu 3803) (Stjernquist 1998b).

A rich assortment of blocks of clay, most of them with different types of ornament, occurs among the finds (discussion in Stjernquist 1998b).

During the Migration and Vendel Periods the settlement had moved about 500 metres to the north and was situated at nos. 18:2 and 18:4 (map Fig. 1, no. 1). This badly damaged settlement site could be traced through several pit-houses, one of which contained a pottery vessel with stamped decoration (Stjernquist 1992).

The sites dating from the Viking Age (map



Fig. 5. House foundation no. 9. Detail with wall trench.

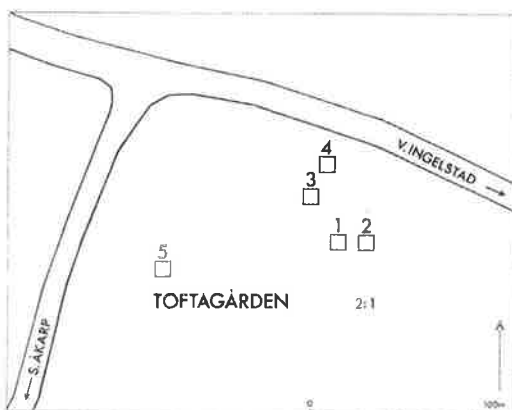


Fig. 6. The Toftagården area with pit-houses marked.

Fig. 1, nos. 4 and 7) are located near the village from the Middle Ages known from old maps, the first from 1708. There are two groups of houses. One, situated at 18:3 to the west of the old village in the same field as the houses dating from the Early Iron Age, consisted of 6 pit-houses and some hearths (map Fig. 1, no. 4). There may have been long-houses as well, but no such structures were discovered there. There are many finds from these pit-houses, among others a balance-pan with a compli-

cated decoration of lines, and a key with an oval handle (Stjernquist 1998b). The other group of pit-houses dating from the Viking Age (map Fig. 1, no. 7) was situated at no. 2:1, east of the area of the medieval village. It is partly from the same age as the group discussed above, but partly later. Five damaged pit-houses have been investigated at this site. One of them, house 5, had in one corner an oven, built of stone. The dating is confirmed by five ¹⁴C analyses (Stjernquist 1998a, Fig. 16).

The date of a hearth excavated in house 1 was cal. AD 718–985 (2 sigma, Lu 1689)
 house 5, burnt clay layer, cal. AD 869–1023 (2 sigma, Lu 1691),
 house 5, occupation layer, cal. AD 977–1168 (2 sigma, Lu 1687),
 house 5, oven of the house, cal. AD 895–1156 (2 sigma, Lu 1688),
 house 3 probably dated by an analysis of hearth A, situated next to it, cal. AD 688–974 (2 sigma, Lu 1690)

House 5 of this group seems to be the latest one of the pit-houses dating from the Viking Age. It is interesting that it was located next to the area of the medieval village. All pit-houses had similar find material. Therefore, it is impossible to see any difference in function, but the hypothesis must be that they were part of the farmstead and had a function in an economic system.

The production and acquisition of resources may have been important for Hötofta. The pottery sherds from the house foundations indicate agricultural production, in which they functioned as receptacles. The analysis of pottery from Gårdlösa, which corresponds to that of Hötofta (Stjernquist 1972).

The rather large amount of bone also tells us about the resources. The majority of the bones from pit-houses 1–6 situated at 18:3

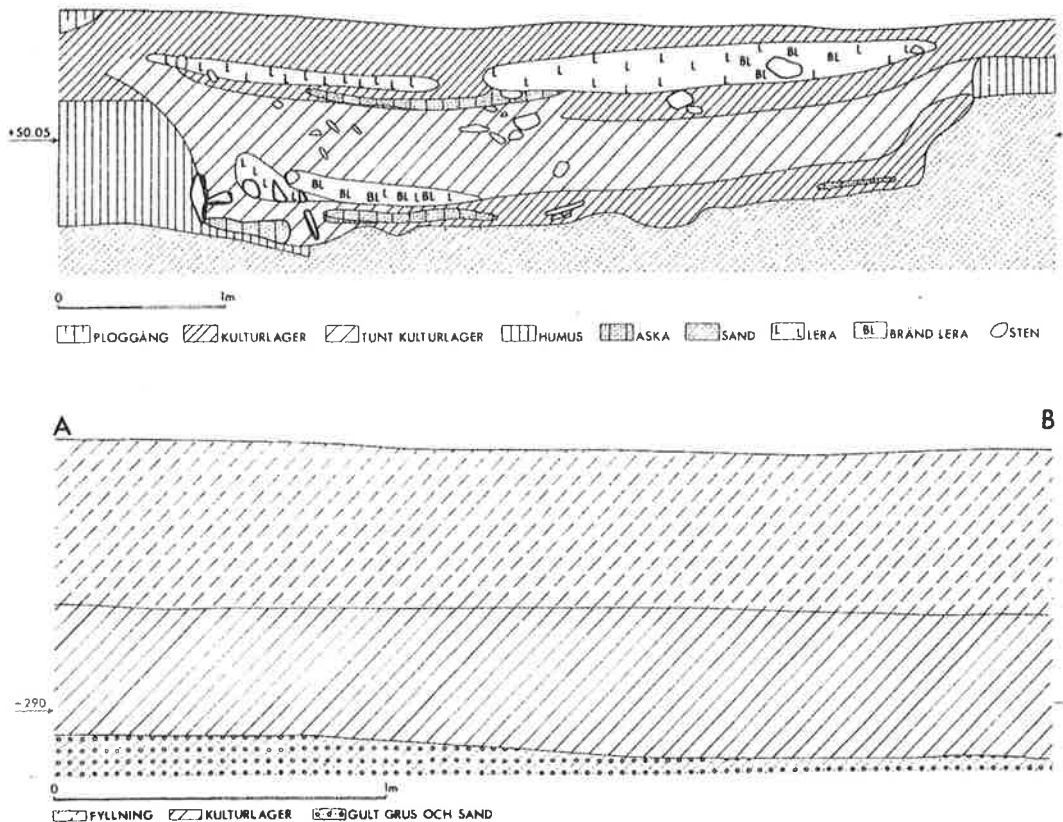


Fig. 7. The Toftagården area. Pit-house no. 5 with a stone-built oven to the left at the bottom.

were from cattle, sheep/goat and pig. Two of the houses, nos. 2 and 5, also contained fish bones, especially cod, but also herring and some kind of pike. The houses dating from the Early Iron Age and the occupation layers showed more or less the same picture representing cattle and sheep/goat as the predominant species. Game was very unusual in the material collected. The analyses of the large quantities of bone from the excavations of the settlement are reported above.

At Hötofta there was iron ore at farmstead 18:3, which may have contributed to the location of a settlement in the Early Iron Age, but perhaps it was exhausted very soon. The changes in location during the Iron Age may

partly be due to desiccation of the sandy ridges. Long-term cultivation may have led to soil deterioration and poor conditions for agriculture as a result. The final shift happened at the transition to the Middle Ages, when the Viking Age community at no. 2:1 seems to have been integrated in the medieval village located nearby.

The pit-houses made up a part of the settlement during the Late Iron Age, the Migration Period, the Vendel Period, the Viking Age, and probably the very early Middle Ages. They obviously were no longer in use in the 10th and 11th centuries.

The development of the settlements in the landscape

In spite of the uneven and damaged material left of the Hötöfta settlement sites they give glimpses of how the village was organized and developed and perhaps a little about the reasons for and the courses of the move. There are several papers of interest in that connection.

The adaptation and progress of the villages from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages is in a special manner the subject of Schmidt-Sabo's paper in 1997. The material in southern Sweden shows large variations which perhaps depends on purpose as well as local conditions. A frequent element is the moving of the settlements, very often several times, until the final adaptation at the beginning of the Middle Ages. Another factor is that the ritual aspect sometimes had great influence, as for instance in Järrestad. There are, on the other hand, settlements where agrarian activity was dominant. Hötöfta seems to be one of these. The royal and the ecclesiastical influence is considered to be important.

Discussion

There are at least two important problems to discuss concerning Hötöfta. The first is the adaptation of the village in the landscape and its development until the Middle Ages. It has been touched upon in my papers in 1998a. The second question concerns the connection between Hötöfta and the central place at Upåkra. This has been analysed in several ways.

The moving of the settlement may have been due to the necessity to find in the landscape a favourable building site with good possibilities for the economic life. The sandy ridges where it stayed during the Migration and Vendel Periods may have been favourable for agrarian activities such as cattle breeding.

After some time they may have become too dry. The result was another move and an adaptation of the Viking Age settlement with pit-houses in areas not far from the village of the Early Middle Age, where the soil had rested for some time.

In my paper in 1998a Hötöfta was identified as an ordinary village. However, analyses of historical geographical evidence were planned already at that time. Since then Mats Riddersporre has carried out analyses with the old map from 1708 as a starting point (Riddersporre 2003). He has studied the *bol-* and *toft-*system of the village based on the assumption that the social and economic structure of the society is displayed in the landscape. He has found evidence for the interpretation that "Hötöfta in the Early and Middle Ages was not an ordinary village – in the way it was in 1708. On the contrary, it appears as if it was a large farm with subject farms and *coloniae*. The Viking Age settlement revealed by the pit-houses falls well within the reconstructed toft of the large farm, which indicates that it may date back to this period." Riddersporre assumes that it should be seen as the manor-in-the-village that is a reflection of an ordinary settlement of the Early Middle Ages. The social and economic structure of the society is displayed in the landscape (Riddersporre 2003, pp. 147–153, with Figs. 8–11).

The large farm contains the areas with pit-houses dated to the Viking Age which are situated near the settlement of Hötöfta according to the map of 1708. The latest of them seems to be foundation 5 at the area of Toftagården to the east of Hötöfta (Figs. 5, 6 and Fig. 1, no. 7). Riddersporre compares this with the situation in Grevlunda and discusses different possibilities regarding the function and status of Hötöfta.

The rather high status of Hötöfta does not mean that it had a special connection to Upåkra, even if we have to reckon with good connections by means of the road (Erikson

1999). The economic life of the society with necessities for sale may have depended on connections with other settlements, for instance Hököpinge or any others. There may have been good conditions for cattle breeding in the same way as has been assumed for the agrarian activities at Gårdlösa (Stjernquist 1993).

In the Iron Age, there have been villages of different size, ordinary villages as well as large villages and centres. The relations between them is a problem which has been discussed by many scholars. Schmidt-Sabo's paper is a good basis for a discussion concerning the development of the ordinary villages and also for their relation to the centres. The same problem is examined by Callmer in 2001 but his discussion is restricted to Uppåkra and a series of villages around and not very far from it. He uses place-names as well as the phosphate map. He found a series of villages of different size around Uppåkra which may be contemporary with one or more phases of the large settlement.

These villages have been important for supporting the population of the large centre and for producing raw material for handicraft. How large the area with supporting villages may have been is a problem that needs to be discussed, but Hötofta is probably too far away and not included. It has been emphasized in another connection that the social organization of the villages is highly varied, which affects large as well as small ones (Stjernquist 2001). The structure of the landscape must be seen in relation to the organization of the support of the population of different settlements.

The connection between Hötofta and Uppåkra can also be illustrated by means of find material. The pottery, which has a local character, has been studied intensively with this question as a starting point (Stilborg 1998, 2001 and 2003).

The pottery from Hötofta has previously been used for an analysis of quality and function (Stjernquist 1972). The result of the analysis was that there were three kinds of pottery designated A–C, all produced of local clay. They differ as regards the thickness of the sherds and the temper. The function may be related to the fabric.

The new analysis could use the old one but only partly because of the different starting points (Ramstedt 1999). It used parts of the same find material, however. Two areas of trench III were chosen for the analysis. The material from both of them was very homogeneous. The classification is based on the thickness of the sherds, on the size and character of the temper and on the size and temper of the base sherds. The result is three groups of vessels which are different in the size of the rim, in the size of the body and in the coarseness of the fabric.

Pottery sherds from Uppåkra settlement have also been analysed and studied in relation to the layer sequence (Dahlström 1999). The result of this analysis is that the fabric of the pottery is coarser in the bottom layers and finer in the layers higher up. This is in accordance with Vifot's observation (Vifot 1936). The question is whether the difference is real or only a result of the circumstances of the stratification. The material has at any rate been used for a comparison between the pottery in Uppåkra and in Hötofta (Dahlström & Ramstedt 1999). The result shows some difference. The pottery in Uppåkra indicates the occurrence of specialized craft production, while the pottery from Hötofta shows a picture of stable production for the needs of an Iron Age settlement. This difference may perhaps be interpreted as a difference between the craft at a centre and that at an ordinary agrarian settlement. These questions have been discussed by Stilborg in his papers 1998, 2001 and 2003.

Conclusions

After a presentation of the different parts of the settlement at Hötofta, problems debated by several scholars have been taken up and commented. The discussion may illustrate the function of Hötofta, the adaptation of the settlement and its use of the landscape for living and development. The aim of the paper has been to summarize and utilize the research about it carried out in recent years.

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