Animal husbandry and social hierarchies in Östergötland in the Pre Roman Iron Age

by

Maria Petersson

Abstract:
In this paper, I discuss if and how animal husbandry can relate to social hierarchies. At Abbetorp, in western Östergötland, Sweden, one large and one small farm from the Pre Roman and Early Roman Iron Age, ca 400 BC – 200 AD were excavated. The interpretation is based on the layout and components of the different farms as well as the finds. The differences between the two farms are interpreted as an indication of a stratified society and the large farm is thought to have a higher position in the social hierarchy than the small one.

I have compiled the osteological studies made on habitation sites in Östergötland and calculated the share of the different domestic animals in the bone material. Abbetorp shows an exceptionally high share of horsebones and a high share of cattle. From the Late Iron Age there is evidence of aristocratic horsemanship related to hunting and cavalry. I suggest an interpretation of the Abbetorp bone-material along those lines, though at a less elevated level in the hierarchy. At the small farm the share of horse bones was also high, showing that it too, was involved in the work with the horses. It appears that the large farm influenced the animal husbandry production at the small farm. Otherwise one would expect to find a more normal distribution among the domestic species.

From this period there are traces of a well-organised system of grazing with focal points spread in the pastureland. Here shepherds and dogs as well as animals have rested here and possibly stayed overnight. It is not an unlikely thought that farms like the big farm at Abbetorp have been very influential in the organisation of the grazing, since it has probably steered the production of its neighbour.

Social organisation during the Early Iron Age in Scandinavia

Ethnological material shows that social affiliation had many expressions, appeared in all stages of life and could always be understood by the contemporary local society. This indicates that a variety of archaeological materials can be used to explore such issues.

From the Viking Age the written sources describe a hierarchical society with classes from slaves to kings. Charlotte Fabech and Jytte Ringtved have in a paper tried to specify the archaeological indications for different social levels in this hierarchy. Their scheme comprises three levels; central places of over-regional importance, central places of regional importance and ordinary settlement sites. Few places have had more than regional importance.¹


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the latter farms as run by slaves that legally had no kin and were not buried in barrows.²

Lotte Hedeager has studied the Danish graves from the Iron Age. From the Early Iron Age in particular there are graves with weapons and graves with lavish burial goods. Hedeager interprets these as a result of emerging social hierarchies. The rich grave goods are testimonies of conspicuous consumption by families aspiring to belong to the elite in a period when the elite stratum was still developing. Weapon graves belong to individuals that formed part of escort of local rulers. When the status and position of warriors and elite became hereditary the lavish expressions of conspicuous consumption are no longer found in the archaeological material. Hedeager claims that the described development starts already in the Pre Roman Iron Age and that the occasional weapon graves from this period is an expression of this.³

On the Swedish island of Öland there are still visible remains of houses and ruined stonewalls from the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period. The dwelling houses can be divided in three groups depending on their length. Mats Widgren has interpreted these as expressions of different social strata of which he has identified four. These are small households comprising of slaves or dependent labourers; medium sized farms with 10 – 12 animals kept in the house-byre; large farms with 18 - 20 animals in the house-byre, often consisting of more than one house gathered around the farm yard and often with a separate hall for feasting; large farms of the same type as just described but distinguishing themselves from these by treasure hoards, finds of gold and extensive traces of craftsmanship, where a surplus was amassed outside of the household by control of this craftsmanship and by acquiring the surplus from other farms.⁴

From Denmark there is an interesting study of inhumation graves from the Iron Age.⁵ It shows that during the Roman Iron Age and particularly the Late Roman Iron Age, the persons buried with a higher than average number of grave goods, with jewellery of precious metals or a higher than average number of Roman imports also, with few exceptions, had statures above average. Jansen Sellevold states that "the reason for the variations in stature must be sought in the living conditions, especially in the nutrition".⁶ Stature is affected by the nutrition during childhood and adolescence and particularly for boys, poor nutrition during this period, or parts of it, can not be made up for but will result in lower stature as a grown up. From the Pre Roman Iron Age there are no inhumation graves but a skeletal material exists from Danish bogs. These individuals have calculated statures above the normal for the Iron Age,⁷ an indication that the societal mechanisms resulting in unequal access to food were already existing then.

What was the size of the areas within which these hierarchies existed? Skre discusses some valleys in Romerike in Norway and indicates that each valley has its own power structure. Skre emphasises that power in that period was not the supremacy over land but over individuals.⁸ Widgren comments that in a primitive estate people and territories probably were seen as one.⁹ Fabech and Ringtvæd states that most of the central places are of regional importance only, indicating that the hierarchies comprise regions.¹⁰ Mats Widgren has studied the fossil landscape from the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period in eastern Östergötland. He meant that the farms were loosely joined in pastoral organisations covering areas larger than the territories of historical villages but smaller than medieval parishes.¹¹ In a recent article Widgren suggests that in each such pastoral organisation, a large farm has played a central role. He compares the pastoral organisations to medieval estates and to some extent to medieval villages.¹²

From the Roman Iron Age and onwards there are different kinds of archaeological materials from different parts of Scandinavia interpreted as exponents of hierarchical societies. From the Pre Roman Iron Age the signs hereof are fewer and more scattered but do nevertheless exist.

Abbetorp – the two farms and their arrangements for animal husbandry

Abbetorp in western Östergötland is situated on the edge of the Östgöta plain in the transition zone between plain and forest (Fig. 1). A large area with traces of a large and a small farm were excavated here in 1996 – 98 (Fig. 2). The two farms were dated to the Pre Roman and Early Roman Iron Age.¹³

The large farm comprised of a dwelling-house (house 2); two out houses (houses 1 and 4); an area set aside for cereal handling possibly with cereal drying and roasting and maybe also threshing, brewing beer, baking and forging. Further more there was an area with over a hundred hearths for everyday cooking during the summer season and a fenced in area with ovens for large scale cooking, possibly for storage and feasting. The dwelling-house is dated to 400 BC – 140 AD, a ca. 30 m long, three-aisled house divided into three rooms. The central room was large due to the convex walls of the house and the hearths of the room placed along one wall, thus creating a large open space. The room can be compared to hall buildings from later periods when halls had a representative function and were the setting for feasting, sometimes with ritual elements. On each side of this large room there were smaller rooms, where one might have had a private function maybe a sleeping place and the other might have been a storage room. There is no evidence that the house ever held a byre where animals were stalled during the winter. To the west of the dwelling-house, on the other side of a small river that ran through the farm yard, there was a ca. 12 m long, three-aisled house (house 1) with two rooms interpreted as a farm building belonging to house 2. This house might have housed farmhands and/or slaves and it has no byre. North of this house there was a small fenced-in area with a small shed (house 4) and extensive traces of brewing and forgery.
Fig. 2. The Abbetorp settlement site. Area 10 above (containing house 1 and 4) area 11 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Cattle %</th>
<th>Sheep/goat %</th>
<th>Pig %</th>
<th>Horse %</th>
<th>Teeth %</th>
<th>Dating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vistad, Väderstad sn</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>1000 – 400 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyssgården, Örnenby sn</td>
<td>48 (51)</td>
<td>32 (32)</td>
<td>12 (8)</td>
<td>8 (8)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Late Bronze Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAA 251, Slaka sn</td>
<td>39 (33)</td>
<td>30 (19)</td>
<td>22 (26)</td>
<td>9 (21)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Early and Middle Pre Roman IA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbetorp, area 10 (large farm)</td>
<td>77 (80)</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>18 (19)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>400 BC – 140 AD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbetorp, area 11 (small farm)</td>
<td>50 (39)</td>
<td>2 (-)</td>
<td>39 (51)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>400 BC – 240 AD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbetorp, area 10 and 11</td>
<td>61 (58)</td>
<td>6 (5)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
<td>400 BC – 240 AD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAA 89, Högby sn</td>
<td>38 (31)</td>
<td>36 (40)</td>
<td>21 (24)</td>
<td>4 (5)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Early Roman Iron Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAA 162, Linköpingsstad</td>
<td>46 (48)</td>
<td>25 (25)</td>
<td>18 (16)</td>
<td>10 (10)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Roman Iron Age and Migration Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herrbo, Borgs sn</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>600 – 1000 AD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAA 173, Motala sn</td>
<td>53 (51)</td>
<td>16 (15)</td>
<td>27 (34)</td>
<td>1 (-)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Late Iron Age and Early Middle Ages (670 – 1300 AD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stora Ullevi, Linköping</td>
<td>35 (29)</td>
<td>30 (33)</td>
<td>31 (35)</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The smaller farm at Abbetorp was situated ca. 120 m east of the main building of the large farm. It was set on a hillock near a small stream and is represented by a three-aisled house (house 3). Directly south of the house there is a well-defined farmyard with hearths as well as cooking pits, and immediately north of the house there is a field that is also contemporaneous with house 3. The three-aisled house was 16 m long and divided into two rooms, one for living and one for storage and cooking. The house was C14-dated to the period 400 BC – 240 AD. There were interpretable arrangements made for the domestic animals. The farmyard in front of the house was fenced in and its lack of cultural layers and low phosphate content showed that the animals had not had access to this area. Adjacent to one of the gables there had been a porch interpreted as a milking place, a shelter for animals in difficult weather conditions and possibly also a feeding place.

At the Abbetorp site there were no conclusive evidence that the houses had ever contained a byre, neither at the big farm nor at the small one. In Scandinavia there are few examples of byres from this period. A sparse and regular setting of the posts carrying the roof in one part of the house (generally the western part) is by some scholars interpreted as a sign of a byre section. Others have interpreted this as an economy-section with mainly storage function and call for other evidence as well.14 Lennart Carlie considers it more likely that this part of the house was a room where one could house animals during extreme weather and also during particularly vulnerable periods of their lives. The most valuable animals such as breeding and draught animals might also have had their place here.15

The status indicators

Using the archaeological material from Abbetorp I have interpreted the two farms from the Pre Roman Iron Age as two farms of different size. I have also interpreted them as expressions of a social hierarchy existing in the area. It is possible that the large farm at Abbetorp was the top farm of the hierarchy comprising of the local pastoral organisation, as suggested by Mats Widgren.16 At Abbetorp the following elements have been interpreted as indicators of status:

1. The layout and size of the farmyard where the large farmyard with traces of many different types of activities within defined areas is an expression of high status and the small farmyard with traces of few activities indicates low status.
2. The number of buildings where the farm comprising of more than one building is deemed to have higher status than the farm with just one building.
3. The length and layout of the dwelling house where the

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16. Mats Widgren has suggested that the larger farm at Abbetorp was the top farm of the hierarchy comprising of the local pastoral organisation, as suggested by Mats Widgren.
long house with its hall-like middle room is interpreted as a high status expression and the smaller building with only two rooms indicate lower status.

4. The pattern of consumption regarding cereals with high share of wheat (67 %) and low share of barley (8 %) in the macrofossil material from the main building of the large farm is interpreted as a high status indication. The low share of wheat (24 %) and high share of barley (59 %) is seen as a low status indication of the small farm.

In the following I shall examine whether the traces of animal husbandry at the Abbetorp site can be interpreted in terms of social hierarchies.

Animal bones at Abbetorp

In this section I discuss the animal bones. For comparison I have compiled the excavated sites where bone analysis has been carried out on a sufficiently large material. The sites included are those that were deemed to have an agrarian character, that is farms or villages from prehistoric (Bronze and Iron Ages) or medieval times, cal1000 BC – 1300 AD.

For these materials I have calculated the percentage of bone fragments of the main domestic species: cattle, sheep/goat, pig and horse, using the number of fragments. Studies have shown that the number of fragments is a good basis for comparison between different sites.7 Well preserved bone materials can give information about strategies of animal husbandry – studies of ages of slaughter can indicate if the production was geared towards meat, milk or wool production or if the production was of general household subsistence character.15 Bone materials from habitation sites in Östergötland dating to the Iron Age is generally poorly preserved and information concerning animal husbandry regimes can not be obtained. Several materials contain a large proportion of teeth and additional small fragments of burnt bone. The bone material from Abbetorp consists of 83 % teeth. At other sites the proportion of teeth varies between 26 % and 94 %. Because of this I have also calculated the percentage of domestic mammal species with the number of teeth fragments as a basis. Comparison between the two ways of calculation shows a high degree of correspondence. In the discussion of the osteological material below I refer to the number of fragments unless otherwise stated.

Most osteological materials in my compilation show a similar distribution among the domestic species. Two locales show deviant distribution: Vistad and Abbetorp. The sites are set about 1 km apart and the natural conditions for animal husbandry are similar. The large differences in the bone material can therefore not be explained solely in ecological terms. The Vistad settlement had ceramic material that resembled that in Poland (and might be imported). The houses were also of an eastern type as well as ovens. At the site there were cup marks and foot soles. The site was interpreted as a centre of chiefdom, encompassing western Östergötland.19

Today an interpretation would probably to a higher degree stress the ritual aspect of the site. The site seems nevertheless extraordinary, as are the finds in comparison with other excavated sites from the same period in the region. The bone material has the lowest share of cattle and the highest share of sheep/goat in my compilation. Larsson estimated that the share of pig was exceptionally high and interpreted it as a sign of feasting connected to the chief in residence. Ethnographical material shows that feasts are part of the strategies used by chiefs to attain and keep status and make alliances.20 Feasts and eating also play a large part in ritual contexts.

The Abbetorp site is the second site that deviates from the ordinary in my material. The large farm is interpreted as having a position high up in the local hierarchy whereas the small farm has a subordinate role in relation to the large farm and is found lower down in the social hierarchy. The bone material from area 10 represents the large farm and area 11 represents the small farm. The material from area 10 is small but shows the same tendencies as that from area 11. The highest percentage of cattle and horse is found at Abbetorp as well as the lowest share of sheep/goat and pig. Looking at teeth only the second highest percentage of horse is found at RAÄ (Riksantikvarieämbetet=Swedish National Heritage Board) 251, Slaka, which is a small farm from the same period as Abbetorp. There is evidence that horses were kept for the meat during the Bronze Age but I suggest that the large percentage of horse bones be connected to the high status character of the large farm. From the Late Iron Age there is evidence for aristocratic horsemanship in Middle Sweden, where well equipped ridinghorses are found in rich graves sometimes together with birds of prey and sight hounds probably all forming part of the aristocratic hunting equipment. Icelandic sagas describe horse breeding with free roaming horseflocks21. From Gamla Uppsala, the ritual centre of Middle Sweden before Christianity, excavations have yielded a high percentage of horse bones. This has been interpreted as a result of the ritual activities lead by the king, where horse and human sacrifices formed part. 22

At Abbetorp the high percentage of horse bones is seen as an indication of high status and the reason for this I see as similar to those of later periods. The high percentage of cattle and horse is also an expression of specialisation in animal husbandry, which is not solely an answer to natural conditions. The proportion of horse is high also at the small farm. If the animal husbandry were geared towards household production one would

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Variation %</th>
<th>Variation, highest and lowest values excluded %</th>
<th>Median %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>23 - 61</td>
<td>35 – 53</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep/goat</td>
<td>2 - 42</td>
<td>22 – 36</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig</td>
<td>6 – 31</td>
<td>12 – 30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>1 – 30</td>
<td>4 – 18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. In the table the distribution of different species at the sites in table 1 is shown.
expect a more normal distribution among the domestic species. It seems therefore that this unit also was drawn into the horsebreeding etc of the large farm and that it was the large farm that directed the animal production here too.

### Grazing in ethno logical research

We leave the dwelling site with its arrangements for the animals and its testimony of different domestic species with an unusually large share of cattle and horse. We turn instead to the surrounding landscape that formed the prehistoric grazing grounds. Since there is no decisive evidence of the animals having been kept permanently in byres during winter during the Pre Roman Iron Age, I assume that they were outdoors during the main part of the year. From this period there are no traces of extensive fencing – these first appear around the Birth of Christ. Most likely the animals were herded by shepherds and their dogs, since wild animals and possibly cattle thieves must have posed a threat to the animals if they were left unattended. In this section I will be briefly considering grazing in the light above all of ethnological research. My main emphasis will be on aspects, which can conceivably leave archaeological traces.

In Sweden, two principal, geographically separate grazing systems have been documented from historic times. One of them occurs in the southern provinces, the other north of the shieling line traversing more or less the middle of the country. Both systems contain elements pertinent to a discussion of prehistoric grazing practices.

In the southern provinces, pasture was most often held in common by the village as long as the out-lying lands remained undistributed. Among other things, common pasturage requires the livestock to be marked. It also demands close regulation of the grazing rights of each homestead. It is worth mentioning here that in historic times no less than 80% of the village by-laws consisted of rules on grazing. There were also parts of Sweden where the villages were larger but where each homestead made its own grazing arrangements.

Different livestock species have different grazing needs, added to which, dairy cows, draught animals and young livestock were differently treated. During historical times dairy cows grazed near the homesteads, draught animals used irregularly were kept further away and young cattle and sheep grazed furthest away of all. The animals were accompanied by one or more herdsman whose task was to keep track of the animals, defend them from thieves and predators, and make sure that they were able to feed. The herdsman often had a dog to help him. In Scandinavia from the Bronze Age onwards, we can assume the presence of a specialised herding dog whose task was to fend off wild animals and keep the livestock together. In central and southern Sweden there was a grazing organisation, run by boys between the ages of ten and twelve, the existence of which has been confirmed from the 16th century. In Skåne and on the continent, the village herdsman was a full-grown man.

In the Roman Empire, prisoners of war or other slaves were often detailed to guard the livestock. A grazing day lasted from sunrise to sunset. During the day the animals were put out to pasture. Herds grazing on forest land could not be very large, and so in cases of this kind the villages did not generally share a herdsman. In the shieling area there were cases of the land belonging to the individual shielings being divided up into small areas, gasstor, which were grazed on a particular day of the week. It was common for the small areas of the different shielings to converge on a point where the herds-people took their noonday rest, which made for regular meetings between herds-people from different shielings. Methodical grazing cycles of this kind also occurred in other parts of the country. All over Scandinavia, the horsefly was a torment to livestock.

A note from the 16th century describes how herdsmen would light smoky fires – smudges – of tarry spruce to fend off the insects. The earliest Germanic codes of law from the 6th century AD show that for a private herdsman, serving one master only, the size of the herd was limited to 12 animals. Central European herdsmen in historic times have hardly ever been known to cook food in the open. Instead they were issued with food by the farmers and would often return to the village in the evenings for a meal in the farmhouses.

The grazing system is characterised by certain penning devices on pasture land. In Eastern Europe, for example, structures of this kind were built of reeds. From medieval continental grazing systems there are descriptions of folds consisting of four posts, wattle sides and straw roofs. There were also sheep shelters with movable walls. More substantial shelter was provided, for example, in the form of earth ramparts, known to us from Luneburger Heide in the 19th century. These shelters served as windbreaks and as gathering points for the livestock. Often the animals were driven to such places at night for better protection from predators. There were also unfenced corralling places. The location of these places could be indicated in the grazing by-laws. Sometimes there was also a hut for the herdsman to spend the night in.

Transhumance is a special form of grazing in which the pasture is located at a distance, sometimes several days’ march from the home farm. The shieling is the Nordic form of transhumance in historic times. Shielings can be viewed as a way of moving the agrarian economy into the outlying land. This includes both grazing and the production of winter fodder, as well as crop husbandry and dairy activities. The main driving force behind the establishment of shielings was the need for winter fodder. Shielings were a means of utilising peripheral natural resources at the same time as lands near the home farm could be used for cereal cultivation and as a source of winter fodder for the livestock. The shielings often had a hay meadow, a dwelling house for the shieling workers and some kind of byre. The animals were taken to the shielings in early summer, returning home in autumn. At the shielings it was usually women who tended the animals and took charge of the milk. Most often they would then live at the shielings. Since
the grazing here was on forest land, it was not practical for herds above a certain size to be kept together, and so the usual arrangement was for the different farms to have their own herds-people and separate buildings at the shieling. There were also cases of several farms pooling a shieling between them and hiring a milkmaid (bodjanta) who, with the assistance of a small boy, could look after 20 or so cows. The woman looked after the dairy side of things and the boy tended the livestock at pasture. With a second boy to help her, a milkmaid could look after the milk from 40 or 50 cows. 10

Shielings are confirmed in the Värmland region from Viking times, and the surviving settlement from that era already shows traces of two distinct grazing organisations at the shielings, one communal and one with each homestead having its own herds-people. 11 From the late Bronze Age and Pre Roman Iron Age there is an investigated site at Rössberga in the parish of Odensala, Uppland, where small house foundations and small, terraced fields hugging the terrain were discovered. This site has been construed as a shieling from the late Bronze Age and Pre Roman Iron Age. 12 In the south of Sweden there is a material of settlements and areas with only stray finds which could be taken to indicate transhumance already in Neolithic times. 13 From the late Neolithic and the Bronze Age, Prescott has described, from the interior of Sognefjord in Norway, a system of land use which included areas extending from the fjords to the valleys of the mountain foothills. This economy was based on animal husbandry and hunting. Prescott points to the role of women in grazing operations, on similar lines to the practice of later ages in the same region. 14

The aspects of grazing as described in ethnological research that are the most likely to leave intelligible archaeological traces are the resting places of shepherds with traces of cooking, fireplaces for heat and sometimes small huts with pens where animals were kept at night. It is also conceivable to find different arrangements for the preparation of milk products.

The archaeological traces of grazing in the landscape

It has been said that whereas arable farming is visible primarily in archaeological excavations, animal husbandry is visible above all from pollen charts. 15 A pollen chart from a sampling point about 1.5 km south-west of the Abbetorp settlement site shows only faint signs of human presence before about 1000 BC. By about 400 or 300 BC, grazing indications in the area have become very powerful, and wheat pollen begins to appear at the same time. 16 This coincides in time with the establishment of the Abbetorp site. Pollen charts from the south of Sweden reflect a distinct opening of the landscape in the middle of the Bronze Age, and above all an expansion of open grazing land. 17 A similar process has been detected in several pollen charts from west Östergötland. 18 Lagerlås & Regnell link the opening of the landscape to winter grazing of domestic animals. 19

In connection with the building of a highway in west Östergötland a series of off-site archaeological remains located within a 7 km long section came to be closely investigated. Several sites with solitary hearths or groups of hearths were unearthed. These did not form part of contemporary settlement sites nor were they connected to contemporary cemeteries. Furthermore they were not connected in any way to contemporary arable fields. The hearths and groups of hearths were mainly dated to the period 1000 BC – BC/AD even though later datings exist. It is striking how the appearance of the hearths coincides in time with the pollen charts reflecting an opening of the landscape. It is also striking how the hearths are very rare once fences of stone are being erected in the grazing grounds around the Birth of Christ. The solitary hearths and groups of hearths can consist of anything from one feature to a hundred. Occasionally there are huts at these sites. The hearths are often located in the proximity of water, sometimes in the form of a dug out water hole. These locals are also often found taking shelter from the wind below a steep hill. The 14C-datings of individual features at such locals often indicate that they have been in use over a long time-span and that the people returned here time and again.

In a study I have compared the solitary hearths and groups of hearths with the hearths at the Abbetorp settlement site. 20 Hearths from three different areas with different archaeological interpretation were compared. One of the areas was set aside for everyday (outdoors) cooking during the summer months (area 11). The second area bore traces of everyday cooking and drying and roosting of cereals as well as baking (area 10). The third area was situated adjacent to a cemetery dated to Later Roman Iron Age and Migration Period and the hearths formed part of the rituals here (area 7).

One element that was compared was the layer sequence. The solitary hearths were, as far as layer sequence is concerned, mostly connected with what was found in area 11 with a prominent element of cooking. Several of the hearths, both solitary and in areas 10 and 11, showed signs of reuse. Whereas about 50 % of the hearths at the settlement site contained cereals, very few of the solitary hearths did so. The handling of cereals is at the settlement site connected to cooking and food preparation mainly for storage and one would not expect to find traces of such activities scattered in the landscape. To conclude, the solitary hearths and groups of hearths showed such similarities to hearths connected to cooking at the settlement site that they were interpreted in this vein.

In trying to interpret the solitary hearths and hearth groups, I have treated them as exponents of the same phenomena. This means that there is a phenomena that has long continuity, where specific places have been visited on repeated occasions, where one of the major activities that left archaeological traces is cooking and where permanent arrangements were made, such as huts and water-holes. I consider the activity in prehistoric society that most closely would answer to this description is well organised grazing where the animals were
herded. The fact that some places were focal points to which people have returned over time suggests that the activity be well organised. To my view it also suggests that questions concerning grazing rights were solved. If not there would have been few if any places with permanent arrangements.

Conclusive remarks on social hierarchies and animal husbandry regimes

In this paper I have explored if and how the animals connect to the status and rank of a settlement site. At the Abbetorp settlement site two farms, one large and one small, from the Pre Roman and Early Roman Iron Age were excavated. I have assumed that the farms belonged to different strata in a hierarchical society. The large farm possessed higher status and it is possible that it held the power over a sizeable territory where the inhabitants were dependent on the large farm. Even though the small farm at Abbetorp was dependent on the large farm I have interpreted it as a farming unit in its own respect.

My compilation of osteological materials from Östergötland shows that places with ritual significance as well as places with a position high up in the local hierarchy (of power) may have a composition of domestic animal bones that deviate from the normal. At Abbetorp there was an extremely high percentage of bone fragments from horse bones, a high percentage of cattle bones but a very low percentage of sheep/goat and pig. The very high proportion of horse bones might be interpreted as a sign of horse breeding, generally connects to the art of riding in high status milieus. 41 Horse bones in weapon graves from the Roman Iron Age points at the importance of the cavalry. On the continent cavalry troops were set up already in the Pre Roman Iron Age and the Abbetorp finds may indicate that this was the case in Scandinavia too.

The presence of a high proportion of horse bones also at the small farm shows that the animal husbandry regimes of this unit was in fact monitored by the large farm. Mats Widgren’s interpretation that in each grazing organisation there was a dominant farm seems a plausible explanation to the situation at Abbetorp. Maybe the small farm was, to an even higher degree than has so far been shown, dependent on the large one. Is it possible that the persons living here were herdsmen to the herds of cattle and horses that were grazing in the area? The permanent arrangements for grazing found in some places nearby and the organised way in which it was conducted might very well be taken as indications of a leading farm having the last say in matters concerning grazing. Further processing of the finds is planned and maybe the material culture will shed more light on the relation between the two farms.

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