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By Tony Björk and Ylva Wickberg

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In 2011 remains of an unusual linear Iron Age monument were discovered at Degeberga in southern Sweden. The documented traces of the structure consisted of three roughly parallel rows of hearths, pits and post holes, flanking a hollow way notched into a slope. Over 130 m of the structure were uncovered, but this was apparently only a small part. The monument dates from the Roman Iron Age in its earliest phases and from the Migration Period in its latest phases. East of the monument was a severely damaged cemetery of the Late Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age, being at least partly coeval with the linear structure. The Degeberga monument shares many traits with other Iron Age monuments in Sweden. We argue that they have a common background both in ritual respects and in a political and social transformation of society around AD 400–700.

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In 2011 we excavated the remains of a complex Iron Age structure at Degeberga in the province of Scania in southern Sweden. The occasion was a rescue excavation of a Bronze Age settlement site. The discovery of the large-scale linear structure – consisting of hearths, pits, and postholes – along with an Iron Age cemetery required an extension of the excavated area (Björk & Wickberg 2012). The structure may at first sight seem unique, but it has many points in common with other cult and burial sites in Scandinavia.

Ritual sites of the Scandinavian Iron Age are often associated with weapons, pots, human wetland sacrifices, hillforts and richly equipped graves. This paper focuses on ritual space in the Iron Age and how it changed over time, with brief looks

at similar monumental configurations in the landscape and what they represent.

Landscape and monuments

Degeberga is in a topographically dramatic location where three types of landscape meet: undulating, light sandy soils descending towards the Baltic Sea to the south-east, the slope of the Linderödsåsen ridge to the west, and the good farmland and low wetlands of the Kristianstad plain to the north. There is a notable concentration of archaeological sites along the eastern slope of the ridge between the hamlets of Västra Vram and Degeberga. These are mainly fossil fields and burial monuments such as barrows and stone settings, many likely dating from the Bronze Age and



Fig. 1. Degeberga village on a military map from 1812–20, and west of it the linear monument site. Note the topography.

Early Iron Age (Björk & Wrang 1998). The area where the linear structure was found is relatively high, about 45 m a.s.l. To the south there is a view over a south slope, a terrace, and a steep-sided valley with a meandering stream. The excavated area is bounded to the north by a road running along an east–west ridge (figs 1–2).

The excavated area was formerly included in two separate surface-surveyed settlement sites in the national register (Raä Degeberga 52–53). Settlement remains from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age/Early Iron Age were documented during fieldwork. Nearby sites include a cemetery with standing stones from the Late Iron Age (Raä 13), areas with fossil arable fields, settlement sites, stone settings, standing stones and barrows.

The cemetery

In the north-eastern part of the excavation area, we found remains of a cremation cemetery measuring roughly 15 × 50 m (fig. 2). The cemetery had been ploughed over in modern times, leaving only rather shallow remains of the graves. These consisted of an urn burial, three urn-in-cremation pits, and a cremation pit. Burnt bones were also found in a shallow pit that may have been the remains of yet another grave, and in a posthole.

The excavated graves were probably part of a larger cemetery extending under the adjacent road and continuing to the north. No superstructures could be observed on the graves in the form of stone settings or cairns, and not much was preserved of the pits themselves: on average they were only about 0.1 m deep. The scant depth of the depressions indicates that an unknown num-

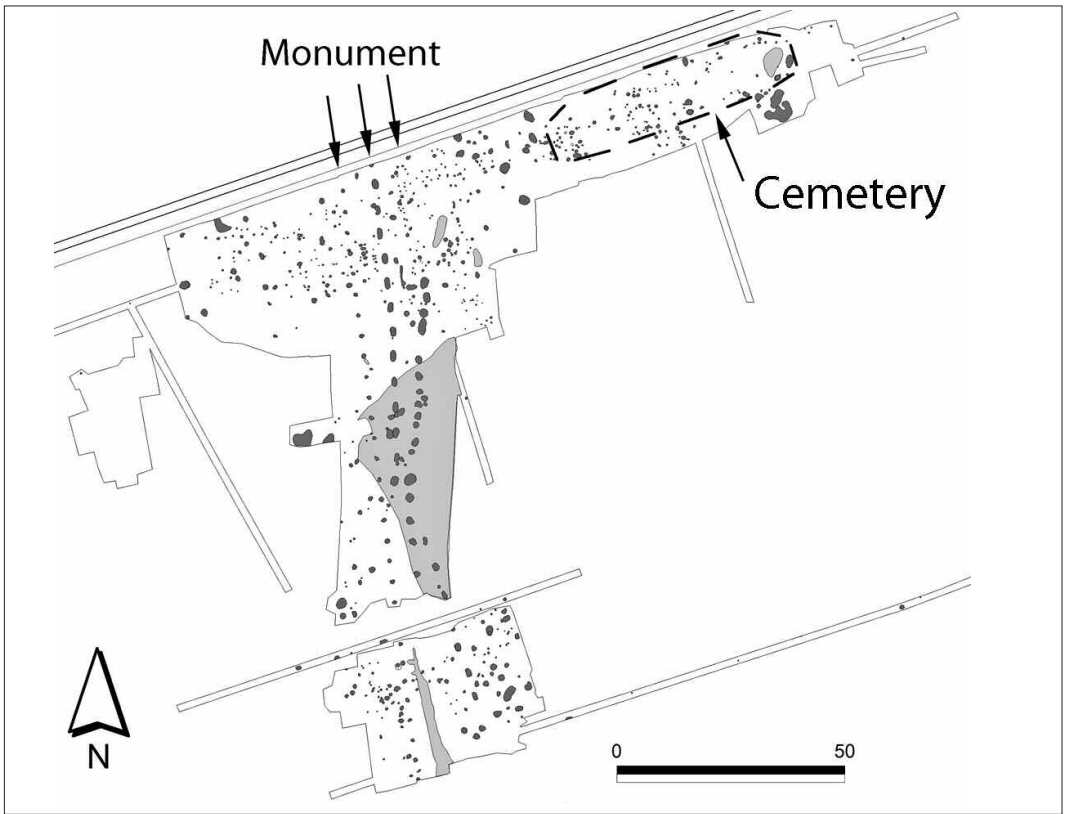


Fig. 2. Excavation plan.

ber of shallow graves have been destroyed by cultivation. Nor can it be ruled out that there were once grave markers that have met the same fate. Four graves merit chronological discussion (tab. 1).

Grave 1574 was an urn burial containing remains of two pots, a burnt bone comb and well over 1 kg of burnt bones. The vessel that held the bones is similar to one from the lavish chamber grave at the Simris cemetery, about 36 km to the south-east. Simris grave 54 is dated to C1–C2 in Eggers and Lund Hansen's chronology for the Roman Iron Age (Stjernquist 1955, p. 20 ff.; Björk 2005, p. 215). The other vessel is a jug of Bech's type 31. At Slusegård on Bornholm, the type is dated to C1 (Bech 1996, p. 82). The comb is an arched single comb of Ilkjær's type 1c. The comb has decoration consisting of arches made up of groups of concentric semicircles, which are com-

mon among combs from phases B2–C2 (Ilkjær 1993, p. 286 f.; Ethelberg 2009, p. 161). The Degeberga comb was placed on the funeral pyre and is therefore so fragmentary that it cannot be determined whether it is an early or later form of single comb. Looking at the find combination, the burial can be dated to the beginning of the Late Roman Iron Age, phase C1 (fig. 3).

Grave 1951 had been damaged by the plough. It contained a pot, an iron sickle, burnt bones and charcoal. The vessel is a cup, with vestiges of the attachment for a handle. The sickle lay under a large potsherd, complete but in four parts. Typologically the sickle is closest to Penack's type 35, but it does not quite have the typical design as it also shows features of type 18. Both types date to the Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman Periods (Penack 1993), as must the burial.

Grave	Dimensions (cm)	Depth (cm)	Fill	Burnt bone (g)	Comment
1574	0,76 x 0,46	0,19	Brownish sand	1108	Two consecutive pits. The smaller one contained the bones and artefacts
	0,48 x 0,42	0,14	Brownish sand with soot and charcoal		
1951	0,96 x 0,70	0,12	Sooty sand	68	Plough-damaged
2395	0,98 x 0,90	0,12	Dark grey and sooty sand with charcoal	195	Plough-damaged. Charcoal ¹⁴ C-dated to 1950±25 BP (UGa-10352)
2584	0,20 x 0,20	0,05	Dark brown sand with some soot	97	Plough-damaged

Tab. 1. Data on four graves in the ploughed-out cemetery.

Fig. 3. Sickle from grave 1951. Comb and pot from grave 1574. Not shown to same scale. The comb measures 28 × 45 mm.



Grave 2395 had been severely damaged by the plough. It contained remains of a pot, burnt bones, and charcoal. The rim of the pot could be partly reconstructed. It is a slipped, smoothed and black-fired pot of Early Iron Age design. The pot has a rim diameter of 9.5 cm, with a slightly everted, somewhat thickened rim edge. We brought the fill of the grave in for water-sieving so that none of the bones would be lost. The pot dates the grave to the Roman Iron Age, and a radiocarbon analysis of charcoal gave a date of 21–12 cal BC and 1 BC–125 cal AD, that is, most likely phase B1 or early B2 (UGa 10352, 1950±25 BP). All calibrated radiocarbon dates here are given with 2 sigma accuracy using OxCal v.4.1.7.

Grave 2584 too was badly damaged by cultivation. It contained remains of two pots, burnt bones, and charcoal. The pots could not be reconstructed, but one of them has Neolithic decoration, while the other represents remains of a smoothed pot with a clearly marked, undecorated shoulder, but with traces of a solid line on some small sherds. Next to the pit we found most of a pot identical to the Neolithic sherds found in the grave. We interpret the smoothed pot as belonging to an urn grave. It most likely dates from the Early Iron Age.

Of five certain graves and a further two possible ones, four can be dated within the time span from the late Pre-Roman Iron Age to the late Roman Iron Age. This means that there is both a spatial and a chronological link between the cemetery and the linear structure.

The linear structure

The structure at Degeberga consisted of partly parallel rows of hearths, pits and postholes. It was at least 135 m long. In the southern part of the structure there were traces of a hollow way. All the lines were oriented north–south (fig. 4). The structure extended down a south-facing slope between the ridge to the north and the steep valley with the Forsakarsbäcken stream to the south (figs 1–2). The southernmost part that was excavated was on a terrace between the south slope and the valley. The structure continued beyond the excavated area in both directions, but we do not know how far it extends. In the southern part we may assume that there was a change immediately outside the excavated area, where the row of posts and the hollow way met the steep creek edge. The linear structure has been dated by radiocarbon analysis of charcoal and charred seeds to the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period (tab. 2).

The hollow way

In the southernmost part of the excavated area, which consists of a terrace, there was a 28 m preserved stretch of hollow way (feature 5699; fig. 4). It was between 0.50 and 4 m wide and about 0.20 m deep. The fill consisted of brown sand, and the excavated part yielded no finds or other datable material. Parallel to its west side was the row of postholes, and on its east side was the row of hearths. The hollow way may be the oldest part of the structure, or at least contemporary with the oldest parts, as it was parallel to both the row

Sample ID	Feature	¹⁴ C age	Cal. 2 σ
UGa-10358	AS 3500	2080±25 BP	176–40 BC
UGa-10359	AS 5327	1900±25 BP	AD 30–210
UGa-10353	AH 4351	1830±25 BP	AD 92–245
UGa-10354	AH 6071	1720±25 BP	AD 250–392
UGa-10355	AH 6263	1710±25 BP	AD 255–401
UGa-10350	AG 3453	1590±25 BP	AD 416–540
UGa-10357	AH 10474	1570±25 BP	AD 425–546
UGa-10351	AG 6216	1560±25 BP	AD 427–558
UGa-10349	AG 3399	1520±25 BP	AD 435–605

Tab. 2. Radiocarbon dates from features in the Degeberga monument. All samples were charcoal. AS = posthole. AH = hearth. AG = pit. Analyses performed by the Center for Applied Isotope Studies, University of Georgia, USA.

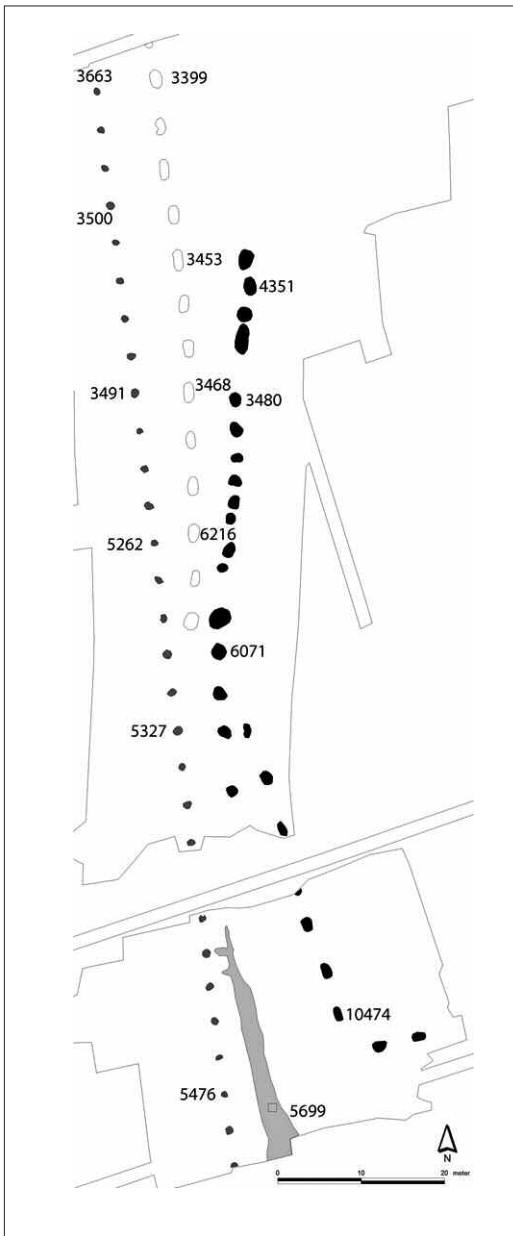


Fig. 4. Plan of the Degeberga monument. Grey features to the left = postholes. Unfilled in the middle = pits. Black to the right = hearths. Numbers refer to radiocarbon-dated features or features otherwise commented on. Number 5699 to the south is the hollow way.

of hearths and the row of postholes. It may have been the starting point for the other linear structures, and its own siting may have had to do with a suitable place to ford the stream, south of the excavated area.

The row of hearths

Along the east side of the hollow way was a row of 25 oblong hearths, about 100 m long (fig. 4). It ran from the terrace in the south to just below the crest in the north. The hearths were relatively uniform, most about 2.2 m long, 1.5 m wide, and 0.1–0.2 m deep, filled with fire-cracked stones and charcoal. The distance between the hearths was regular in some sections but varied in other parts. In the southern part they were placed along a slight rise running the length of the structure on the terrace. Near the south trench edge the row of hearths curved sharply to the east, possibly following the shape of the terrace edge, while the hollow way continued southward. The row of hearths followed the natural topography to a greater extent than other parts of the monument. At least in the southern part, they achieved maximum visibility through their location on the little rise. Charcoal from four hearths was radiocarbon-dated, yielding dates from the Early Roman Iron Age to the Migration Period, with a distinct centre of gravity in the Late Roman Period (tab. 2).

Perhaps the row of hearths was used in a similar way over a long period? The complexity and the doubling of the hearths in the central part of the system indicates that there were gradual changes already in this early phase.

The row of postholes

A few metres west of the hollow way was a straight row of 29 postholes (fig. 4), 135 m long and cut by both trench edges. The postholes were regularly spaced at intervals of 4.65 m (measured from centre to centre), give or take a few centimetres. All were similar: about 0.9 m in diameter, 0.5–0.8 m deep, and lined with large stones. Stains left by the posts and the spaces in the stone linings show that the posts were roughly 0.35–0.40 m in diameter and had flat ends (fig. 5). The fills contained small amounts of charcoal, charred seeds, and occasional small flint flakes and prehistoric potsherds.



Fig. 5. Co-author YW investigates one of the postholes at the monument. Photograph looking east, TB.

Charcoal from two postholes was dated to the Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman Periods (tab. 2). We judge the risk of contamination to be high, however, as old charcoal may have been mixed in when the postholes were dug or back-filled. The row of postholes likely dates from the same period as the row of pits described below, which were dug during the Migration Period, as both rows seem to have been laid out in relation to each other. The size, depth, and stable stone lining of the postholes suggest that the posts were stout, tall, and well anchored. The builders wanted them to be visible from a long distance for a long time, and to dominate their surroundings. The distinct regularity of the row of postholes testifies that its construction and purpose were well thought out. It marked a boundary or steered the way people moved in the landscape, and it caught people's eyes across a large area.

The row of pits

East of the northern part of the row of postholes was a row, at least 70 m long, of 15 pits (fig. 4). They were uniformly rectangular and spaced roughly

5.5 m apart (centre to centre), each measuring 2.5 m by 1.2 m wide by 0.2–0.3 m deep. Most of them contained a thin layer of fist-size stones on the surface, soot and charred twigs, along with a small amount of fire-cracked stones at the bottom. Charcoal from the bottom of three of the pits gave radiocarbon dates in the Migration Period (tab. 2).

The row of pits was found only in the northern part of the monument, in the part that was at the highest elevation and closest to the cemetery. One thing the pits had been used for is heating, but they were shallow and wide, which suggests a fairly low heating effect. They contained nothing to indicate what was heated, but their location and uniform appearance suggests clearly regulated activities. The activities may have resulted in smoke or steam that could be seen and smelled from a distance.

Interpretation and dating

Findings from the linear monument were scanty: charcoal, flint flakes and a few small plain potsherds. They do not help us to interpret the struc-

tures. Instead the location, the spatial relationship between the remains, and the changes that took place over time offer possibilities for interpretation.

The dates of the graves show that the area east of the structure had a sacral function for at least four centuries from the Late Pre-Roman to the Late Roman Period. Also belonging to this period is the row of hearths, which seemed to follow the natural topography and also ran parallel to the hollow way in the south. Radiocarbon suggests different dates for the row of postholes and the row of pits, but this may be due to redeposited older material in the postholes. On the other hand, the charcoal from the pits was clearly associated with their use. The close spatial connection and the identical orientation of the components in the northern part of the monument indicate that they were coeval or at least very close to each other in time. We thus interpret both the row of postholes for highly visible posts and the row of pits as having been made during the Migration Period. Their location and orientation suggest that they followed an established spatial pattern in the landscape: to the north they are related to the cemetery and to the south with the hollow way.

Taken together, the parts of the whole can be described as both monumental and regulated. The builders aimed to create a monument that sent a clear message to contemporaries about a change, or perhaps a reinforcement, of older structures in both the social and the physical landscape. Two main phases in the use of the monument emerge. The first is the complex of hearths, which seems to have surrounded an area east of the hollow way. The hollow way was probably coeval with this phase, but may also be evidence for an older communication route. The second phase consists of the rows of posts and pits, which were geometrically regulated and with a very clear orientation. They may have been part of a much larger structure that surrounded an area whose boundaries lie beyond our trench edges.

Behind the construction of the conspicuous linear monument was a well thought-out geometrical ground plan. It required a major investment in materials and labour, and claimed a large area of land. The result could be seen from miles

around. Was it an important boundary or did it mark an important centre? Was it a symbolic demarcation of a sacred space in the landscape? Was it a processional road leading from the valley towards a cemetery north of the excavated area? Although many questions remain to be answered, we see the Degeberga monument as remains of a demarcation of ritual activities at the cemetery in the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period.

Iron Age linear monuments in Sweden

Linear installations and enclosures from prehistoric times have attracted increasing attention in recent years. In southern Scandinavia they are often associated with causewayed enclosures and palisades from the Neolithic (Andersen 2002; Brink 2009) and to a certain extent with fire cult sites from the 1st millennium BC. The latter consist of often slightly weaving sequences of features, often with one or more rows of hearths or cooking pits, which sometimes extend so far that it is difficult to chart their full length (Heidelk-Schacht 1989; Thörn 1993; Björk 1998a; Prangsgaard & Andersen 2008). There are, however, other types of linear monuments, such as rows of posts and standing stones – mostly from the Bronze Age – at least in Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and southern Sweden, often ending at burial mounds (Thörn 2007, p. 149 ff). Yet straight rows of posts or standing stones, which evidently do not lead to burial monuments but rather seem to have run alongside, demarcated, or enclosed areas in or near Iron Age cemeteries, are rare. Below are some examples of places with clear points in common with the Degeberga monument.

At Ruuthsbo on the south coast of Scania a cremation cemetery was excavated at the start of the 20th century. The graves dated mostly from the Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman Periods, but there was also one from the Migration Period. South of the cemetery ran a row of at least seven hearths in an east–west direction. The hearths have not been dated, but their location alongside the cemetery suggests an obvious connection with them. A few metres south of the row of hearths runs the old coastal road known from 17th century maps; the road must be much older than that (fig. 7; Mårtensson 1911; Björk 2005, p. 88, 202 f).

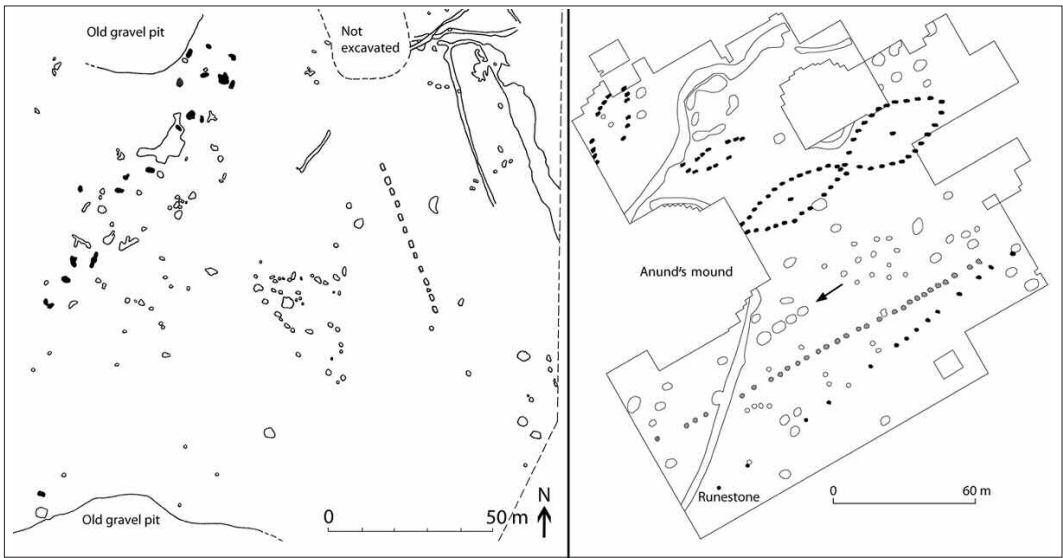


Fig. 6. Left: Önsvala with graves (filled black), row of hearths and possible hollow way. After Larsson 1982. Right: Anundshög with standing stones (filled black), a line of foundations for posts or standing stones, and a possible row of hearths or pits marked with an arrow. Only the standing stones are visible. Other markings are based on geophysical investigations. After Turner 2011; Sanmark & Semple 2011.

At Önsvala, south of Lund, a cemetery threatened by a gravel pit was excavated in 1968–70. The graves dated from the Late Roman Iron Age on through the Viking Period, and the cemetery was flanked by a 50 m long row of hearths. Two hearths were radiocarbon dated to the Late Roman and Migration Periods (Lu-671, 1590 ± 50 BP; Lu-672, 1600 ± 50 BP). Some 40 m east of the row of hearths was a depression at least 60 m long, up to 7 m wide, and 0.5 m deep, with a partly sooty fill that may have been remains of a road. The function of this feature has not been identified before, but a cautious interpretation may be that it was connected with a group of ditches in the same area. On the bottom of the presumed road depression were seven hearths, and the fill contained pottery from the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age (fig. 6; Larsson 1982; Björk 2005, p. 96 f, 197).

North of Lake Ivösjön in Scania is the distinctive cemetery of Gudahagen, surrounded by standing stones, many of which have long since fallen over. The cemetery is on a hill with a good view over the surroundings. Two cobbled earthen ramps

lead from the west side of the slope up to the stone enclosure. The name Gudahagen means literally “the gods’ enclosed pasture”, but we do not know how far back the name dates. In the 1960s and 1970s small-scale excavations were conducted with the aid of archaeology students. Thirteen graves were found, one of which was a damaged cremation grave from the Roman Iron Age or the Migration Period, and a fragmentary Early Iron Age fibula was found beside graves from the Late Bronze Age and the Viking Period. Apart from the unique quadrilateral framework of standing stones, the composition of the burial monument seems relatively ordinary for a cemetery from the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (fig. 7; Arte et al. 1973; Björk 2005, p. 241).

At Old Uppsala is the Högåsen cemetery with great symbolic significance for the Swedish nation state. It has some of Sweden’s largest barrows from the Early Vendel Period (c. AD 550–625 AD), and at least since the eighteenth century it has been associated with the earliest legendary kings of Sweden (Duczko 1996; Ljungkvist 2005). Near this cemetery two structures

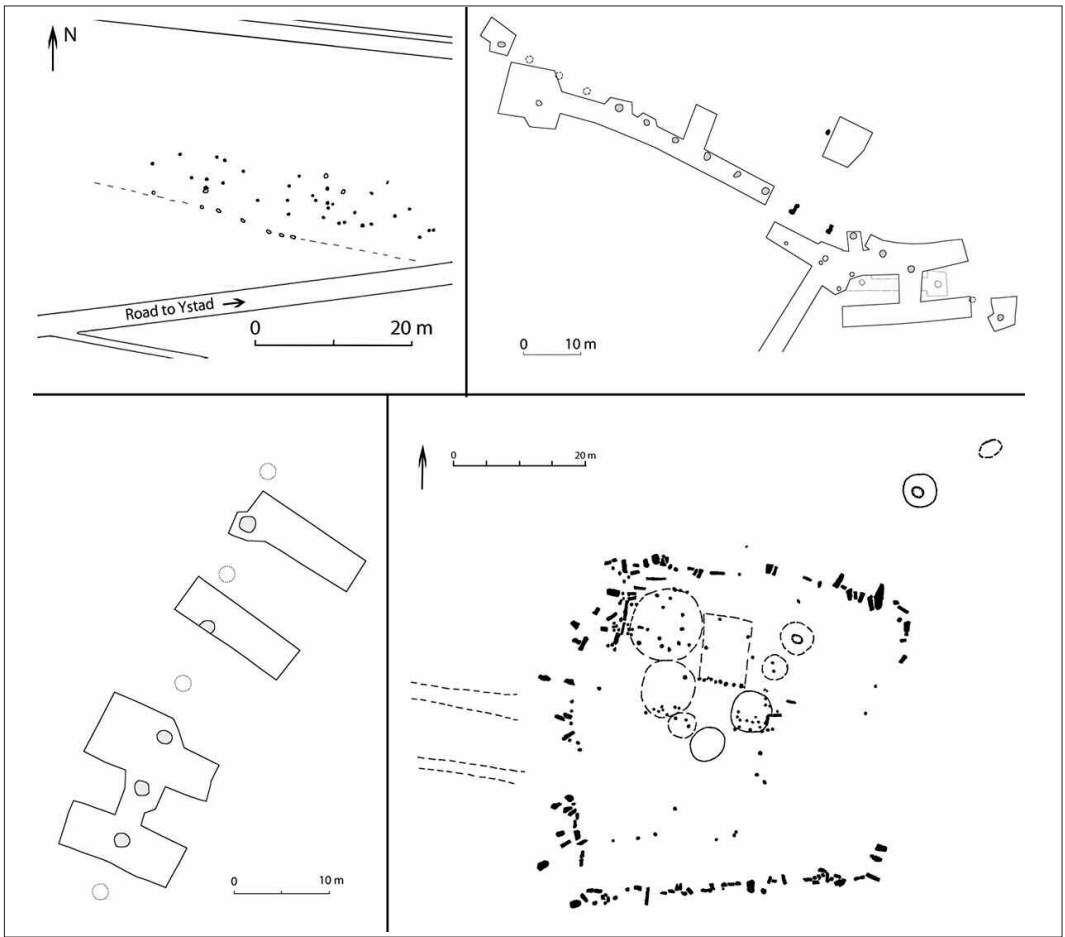


Fig. 7. Top left: Ruuthsbo with graves (filled black), row of hearths, and the old coastal road and its changed course to the south. After Mårtensson 1911. Top right: Old Uppsala, site 9, with visible stone packings (black), stone foundations (grey), and presumed stone foundations. Based on Wikborg 2011. Bottom left: Old Uppsala, site 23C, with stone foundations (grey) and presumed stone foundations (unfilled). After Göthberg 2011. Bottom right: Gudahagen with stones and standing stones (black), approach ramps and individual grave monuments. After Arte et al. 1973.

were discovered in 2010 which are interesting parallels to Degeberga. Both consist of foundations for standing stones. The first was a row of five regularly spaced foundations which is estimated to have had at least nine standing stones, probably many more. The stones led down towards the Samnan stream, and probably marked a ford. The stones may have flanked a road towards Old Uppsala. One of the foundations was radiocarbon-dated to the Migration Period (fig. 7; Göthberg 2011, pp. 36 ff, 131). The other site is about 1.4 km

to the south. It consists of a row, at least 100 m long, with twelve securely documented (and probably at least 18) foundations for standing stones. Parallel to the line of stones was a row of hearths, running 4–5 m south of it. Two stone foundations and two hearths were radiocarbon-dated to the Vendel Period, while one stone foundation each was dated to the Early Bronze Age and the Early Roman Period respectively. The earlier dates were probably due to redeposited charcoal: a Vendel Period date for the structure as a whole seems

likely. Geophysical investigations have shown that the row continues, running about 400 m in a westerly direction and then turning to the north at the edge of the Högåsen cemetery, where there are also two hollow ways (fig. 7; Wikborg 2011, p. 117 ff, fig. 122). Both of these sites will probably see further excavations in connection with work on the railway from Uppsala northwards.

A boundary in the form of a row of still extant standing stones is found along a hollow way and a ford at the Anundshög cemetery near Västerås. The row consists of 14 standing stones, one of them with a runic inscription. This dates the row to the Viking Period. Geophysical and archaeological investigations in 2006 and 2008 revealed a row of foundations for standing stones or posts 5–25 m north of the visible row of stones and running on a slightly different alignment. Two foundations were excavated and found to be stratigraphically later than a cooking pit dated to the Roman or Early Migration Periods (fig. 6; Sanmark & Semple 2011, p. 6 ff). The structure has been interpreted as a symbolic demarcation of the site. It may have served as a *vébönd*, a sacred delimitation of an assembly site mentioned in written sources. Another possible parallel function is as a processional route into the area where the assembly meetings were held (*ibid.*, p. 8).

The Rösaring cemetery at Bålsta in Uppland has a processional road, 540 m long, lined by rounded stones and leading up to and beneath a large barrow that is probably from the Late Iron Age. The road has been radiocarbon-dated to the Vendel and Viking Periods (Damell & Östmark 1986; Bratt 2000, p. 10 ff).

Finally, leaving Sweden for Kærup on Zealand, a Late Roman Period cemetery has been found to be delimited by a 50 m long line of standing-stone foundations (Mailund Christensen 2011). The date of the structure is unknown, but the similarity to Degeberga is obvious.

A number of other sites have remains that could be parts of similar linear monuments or enclosures, but in these cases there are no known burials or signs of cult (except for the Färlöv cemetery). Here is a selection of relevant examples with hearths, cooking pits or postholes in rows in Scandinavia, in chronological order: Fosie (Scania, Late Bronze Age), Ørvadgård (Jutland,

Late Bronze Age), Lilla Köpinge (Scania, Late Bronze Age and Early Pre-Roman), Fraugde (Funen, Late Pre-Roman), Ringarekullen (Halland, Pre-Roman and Early Roman), Runegård (Bornholm, Early Roman), Önnestad (Scania, Late Roman), Färlöv (Scania, Late Migration and Vendel Period). At Fraugde the hearths formed a rectangle measuring 45 × 60 m that surrounded a coeval settlement site (Thörn 1993; 1996; 2007; Björk 1998a; 1998b; 2007; 2010 w. refs).

The monuments presented above give us a reason to discuss similarities and differences between them and what they can tell us about how ritual space changed in Scandinavia during the Iron Age.

Relating to the landscape and transforming it

To approach bygone ritual landscapes today we must reflect on the limitations of material remains and our own ways of thinking. Our categorisations, typologies and generalizations allow us to recognize patterns and recurrent combinations, which can shed light on long-forgotten conceptual worlds and patterns of action. This is the strength of archaeology, but at the same time it means that everything in the border zone between sacred and secular is blurred (Thörn 2007, p. 37).

Attitudes to the landscape show both continuity and change. People related to the topographical conditions and were clearly guided by what had previously happened in the landscape: its historical content in the form of roads, boundaries and grave markers. At the same time, they actively transformed the landscape according to new ideas about the world. Ideas about the significance, power and taboos of certain places no doubt lived on (fig. 8). Our point of departure is that monuments like the one at Degeberga must be related to the landscape.

The geographical conditions at Degeberga join three different types of landscape. Looking at the road network before industrialisation and major water regulation projects in Scania, we find at least eight roads meeting at Degeberga. From the slope of the Linderödsåsen ridge, from the wetlands and lake landscape of the Kristianstad plain, along river valleys and ravines, they converged in the valley at Degeberga. Although the road net-



Fig. 8. View of the Degeberga monument and the surrounding landscape during trenching. Photograph looking south, TB.

work would have looked different during Prehistory, the practical conditions favouring particular courses were the same. The basic features of the road network may be assumed to be long-lived. The ridge where the linear monument was built has traces of both settlement sites and sacred settings, and is located beside several probable communication routes, one of which was the hollow way that we found.

Elisabeth Rudebeck (2001, p. 94 ff) considers the question of the association between different types of places in the landscape, arguing that several aspects are important for interpreting the links between cemeteries, cult sites and communication routes. She highlights liminality, cosmology, social aspects and functional ones as a basis for assessing places in the landscape. Liminal places, Rudebeck suggests, are connected to the liminal phase in rites of passage, that is, critical boundary crossings. Such places are charged with power because of their physical character and people's movements, actions and experiences there. Cult sites in a broad sense often show fea-

tures characteristic of liminal places, as well as locations such as high up or low down, far away, or being enclosed. Specifically for south-west Scania, Rudebeck shows clear links between communication routes (especially crossroads), graves and areas of hearths from the Late Neolithic to the Early Iron Age. There were several reasons, based on all four aspects above, why people chose these sites for ritual activities. Several of the characteristic features of liminal places can be found precisely where the Degeberga monument was built.

The Bronze Age tradition of hearths in rows survived past the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Then the use of ritual fires and ritual boundaries in the landscape changed radically during the Late Roman and Migration Periods. Iron Age linear monuments in Scandinavia show a clear continuity from the Bronze Age in their manner of structuring places through dividing lines in the landscape. These dividing lines, however, seem to have become more firmly structured, from usually organically weaving forms during the Bronze Age to

straight lines and increasingly regulated manifestations during the Iron Age – which at least in some cases were also tall structures that could be seen from afar. Thus they also influenced people's perception of space and directed movements on a macro-level in the landscape. It is easy to imagine that they increasingly became manifestations of power over the cult, which was more firmly tied to the social elite during the Iron Age. The linear structures also reflect a growing territoriality. Someone resolutely staked out where people could be, how they should travel, and what they were supposed to do.

Richard Bradley emphasises that the meaning of monuments would have changed over time: "the forms of individual monuments were modified in accordance with changing interpretations. In some cases their entire character might be altered" (2002, p. 85). This applies primarily, of course, to lasting visible monuments, built of stone and earth, rather than those consisting of fire and wood, but the preunderstanding that the meaning could change is important to bear in mind, regardless of the physical form of the monuments. It is not enough to know that a place was used for a long time. It is also important to ascertain whether it represented a vision that was respected by everyone throughout the period when the place was actively used, or if the original idea of the place was changed or rejected in subsequent phases. In the case of Degeberga there was undoubtedly a change in the form, albeit temporary, that also changed how it was experienced.

The strict geometry suggests a set plan. It goes completely against the old organic patterns that followed the topographical conditions more, such as the row of hearths that followed the rounder shape of the ridge. The Degeberga monument suggests that the ritual landscape was transformed and exploited on the basis of new ideas during the Migration Period. There are many signs that this was a scenario enacted in much of Scandinavia at this time. The combination of hearths and posts or stones alongside roads can also be found at other places, as seen above. They all have several points in common with Degeberga. Above all, the Anundshög complex shows such striking similarities to Degeberga that we believe that they are not isolated examples but part of a change in the

use of cult sites and cemeteries taking place over a very large geographical area.

Burial rituals and other rites played an important part in the creation and reproduction of society (Cassel 1998, p. 30; cf. Giddens 1976, p. 118 ff). Irrespective of whether the rituals played a conservative or innovative role, they were instruments in the constant re-creation of society. Lotte Hedeager (1992, p. 83 ff) argued, on the basis of Iron Age evidence from Denmark, that it is important to study the phases when ritual communication underwent change. Such phases can mean that a new ideology and a new self-perception were under construction. The rituals mirrored an actively legitimising role for new status relations, and were not just a reflection of passive traditionalism. In the light of these ideas, such a noticeable change in rituals as we can see at Degeberga seems to have expressed a powerful demand for legitimisation and consolidation.

Linear monuments are a rare site category, but this need not mean that they actually were rare. Detecting them is difficult. Their linear structure makes it easy to miss them in narrow test trenches. The Degeberga monument showed great regularity and strict linear orientation. This we interpret as being related to the sacred environment, represented by the Roman Period cemetery. The linear monument reflects organised and regulated activity, and it was a three-dimensional manifestation that could be seen from afar. Activity on site ends with the monument's abandonment. During or just after the Migration Period there was a geographical shift, or a succession, of the cemetery, about 500 m towards the east. Around AD 900 yet another shift took place, a further 200 m or so eastward.

Cult sites and cemeteries are multifaceted remains that also raise issues of territoriality. Some scholars have associated the relocation of cemeteries during the Late Roman and Migration Periods with a restructuring of settlement at that time. Farms, however, were only moved short distances, a maximum of 1 km, which may not have been good enough a reason to start a new cemetery. This may instead have been connected to other structural changes in society and in the practice of religion itself. Charlotte Fabeck (1991) has demonstrated a break in the continuity of

sacrificial rites during the Migration Period. The old custom of depositing objects in wetlands was abandoned, and cult was practised at settlements instead. As we have seen, this also led to changes in cemeteries. This clear break in tradition, in the form of a linear regulation of cult sites and cemeteries, during the Migration Period, coincided in time with a political consolidation that many scholars describe as a transition from a tribal organisation to kingdoms. The concept of a tribal federation is often used to describe this organisational phase between tribes and kingdoms around AD 300–600 (Näsman 1998, p. 23; Helgesson 2002, p. 33). There were many parallel changes in Scandinavian societies at this time. There were changes in cult and in farming, and the elite had distinct common European experiences and a broad network of contacts; early kingdoms were forming elsewhere in Europe as well, and people were also affected by the growing influence of Christianity (Harrison 1999; Welinder et al. 1999; Näsman 2011).

The Migration Period was a politically and socially dynamic time, in many respects characterised by physically marked territoriality. Ritual sites were affected too, and they seem to have been exploited for explicitly political purposes. The extremely regular linear structures that we know from this time may be regarded as a reflection of this. They can best be understood as an expression of how people perceived space. The monuments strengthened people's idea of space and made concrete claims to it. The boundary between inside and outside, in combination with a specific direction from and to, shows a need to create clear spaces that were coercive and did not allow any scope for interpretation. The linear pattern can be seen as a direct loan from Roman culture, for example the Empire's straight, standardised roads. Such strict geometrical forms in the landscape that we see from the Late Iron Age did not reappear in Scandinavia until the agrarian reforms of seventeenth century onward, based on the stylistic ideals of the Renaissance. The landscape was then divided administratively and economically according to strict geometry, at first on the initiative of the nobility and the state (Lundquist 1996, p. 52 f; Gadd 2000, p. 273 ff). This admittedly anachronistic comparison hints that the strict

regulation was a political expression during the Late Iron Age.

In future investigations of linear monuments from the Iron Age attention should be paid to what sort of activities took place there, which areas they enclosed or excluded, and whether they formed links between places. The relationship to settlements, graves and landscape is also of central importance in their interpretation. In its last phase, the Degeberga monument gives a strictly regulated impression, which steered gaze and movement in the landscape in a much more conspicuous way than in the previous phase. Both the link to older structures and the socio-political situation on the Continent and in Scandinavia in this period suggest that the monument was built equally to connect to history and to legitimise a changed worldview and a new political order.

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Summary

In 2011 remains of an unusual Iron Age monument were discovered in Degeberga, southern Sweden. The documented traces consisted of three more or less parallel rows of hearths, pits and postholes, flanking a hollow way up a slope. Over 130 m of the structure was uncovered, but this was only part of a presumably much longer monument. It dates from the Early Roman Iron Age in its earliest construction phase and from the Migration Period in its last phase. East of the monument was a severely damaged cemetery from the Late Pre-Roman and Late Roman Periods, being at least partly coeval with the linear structure.

Geographical conditions at Degeberga form a meeting of three different types of landscape. Before industrialisation and major water regulation projects, at least eight roads met at Degeberga. The ridge where the linear monument was built has traces of both settlement sites and sacred settings, and is located beside several probable communication routes, one of which was the hollow way we discovered.

The Bronze Age tradition of hearths in rows survived past the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Then the use of ritual fires and ritual boundaries in the landscape changed radically during the Late Roman and Migration Periods. Iron Age linear monuments in Scandinavia show a clear continuity from

the Bronze Age in their manner of structuring places through dividing lines in the landscape. These dividing lines, however, seem to have become more firmly structured, from usually organically weaving forms during the Bronze Age to straight lines and increasingly regulated manifestations during the Iron Age. They influenced the perception of space and directed movement in the landscape.

The strict geometry suggests a set plan. It goes completely against the old organic patterns that followed the topographical conditions more, such as the row of hearths that followed the rounder shape of the ridge. The Degeberga monument suggests that the ritual landscape was transformed and exploited on the basis of new ideas during the Migration Period. There are many signs that this was a scenario enacted in much of Scandinavia at this time. The combination of hearths and posts or stones alongside roads can also be found at other places, as seen above. They all have several points in common with Degeberga. Above all, the Anundshög complex shows such striking similarities to Degeberga that we believe that they are not isolated examples but part of a change in the use of cult sites and cemeteries, taking place over a very large geographical area.