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# Rows of wooden pillars.

## Continued fieldwork at the Degeberga linear monument, with further parallels and societal implications

By Tony Björk and Ylva Wickberg

Björk, T. & Wickberg, Y., 2015. Rows of wooden pillars. Continued fieldwork at the Degeberga linear monument, with further parallels and societal implications. *Fornvännen* 110. Stockholm.

In 2011, the remains of an unusual linear Iron Age structure were discovered at Degeberga in Scania. The monument dates from the Late Roman Iron Age in its earliest phase and from the Migration Period in its latest phase. We identified similarities with structures at the cemeteries of Anundshög and Old Uppsala in the Lake Mälaren area. In 2013, we revisited Degeberga for a second excavation campaign. The picture of the site is becoming clearer; first of all, its date has been markedly refined. The final destruction or abandonment of the monument occurred shortly after 600 cal AD. There are notable consistencies with other similar sites regarding layout and dating, for example with Önsvala, Färlöv and Tomtebodå, which are further discussed here. Finally, we attempt to grasp the many aspects of interpreting these linear monuments. We argue that they represent multifunctional places of regional importance, reflecting perceptions and goals common to politically and militarily influential upper stratum groups over a large part of Scandinavia in the period AD 400–650.

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During the excavation of a Bronze Age settlement site in 2011, just west of the village of Degeberga in Scania, an unusual ancient structure was discovered. It was a linear monument with postholes, pits and hearths from the Late Roman and Migration Periods, which were flanked by a hollowed-out ancient road and a cemetery of the Early and Late Roman Period (Björk & Wickberg 2012; 2013). Degeberga is in a dramatic landscape, where three kinds of land meet: a dominant ridge, hill slopes and a plain with wetlands. The remains of the monument are located on one of the heights in the area, in a widely sightlined position. As far back as it can be studied on maps (Buhrman 1684), the site has been a crossroads, a strategic place in a landscape that was difficult in parts to pass through.

The excavations of 2011 were a small development-led project with limited resources. The County Archaeologist gave permission to depart from the initial plan and uncover the part of the linear monument that was within the development area. During fieldwork, the Bronze Age settlement, the Roman Period cemetery and 130 m of the linear structure were investigated. Neither of the linear monument's ends were found. It consisted of large, massively stone-lined postholes, regularly placed in a long row. They were flanked by a row of pits with a similar rectangular shape and orientation, also regularly placed. In 2011, the row of pits was perceived to have been at least 70 m long and to have had a function connected with heating. The row of pits ran parallel with the row of postholes in the northern part of the exca-

vation area, but at the middle of the post row, the line of pits curved in towards them. At this point, the row of pits was intersected by a row of hearths; these were not so regularly placed, forming a slight curve. In the southern part of the excavation area was part of a filled-up sunken lane that had run parallel to the rows of posts and pits.

Radiocarbon showed that the curved row of hearths was the oldest phase, from the Late Roman Iron Age, while the rows of pits and postholes belonged to the Migration and Early to Middle Vendel Periods. No charcoal or carbonised seeds were found in the postholes that could be attributed to their phase of construction or use, but we assumed that they were coeval with the row of pits, since the two structures related spatially to each other, and for a large stretch were quite parallel. We interpreted the sunken lane as a common denominator for both phases in the history of the monuments, probably being coeval or older. It had a north-south orientation and it extended towards the valley of the Forsakar stream to the south. Near the Forsakar waterfall there was probably a ford, providing good crossing to the foot of the Linderöd ridge (Björk & Wickberg 2013; Wickberg 2014a).

It was clear that we had discovered an unusual kind of ancient monument, even a new type. In the literature we identified a few sites with similar structures, both in Scania and in the Lake Mälaren area, and we concluded they are evidence for a radical transformation of the ritual landscape during the mid-1st millennium AD (Björk & Wickberg 2012; 2013).

#### *Continued fieldwork*

The 2011 excavations raised several important questions. The site is affected by ongoing construction and cultivation, making it urgent to secure scientific information. Therefore a research project was started, funded by the Ebbe Kock Foundation, the Anders Althin Foundation and Sydsvensk Arkeologi AB. We resumed excavations in 2013. A full report is available both in print and online (Björk & Wickberg 2014; [www.sydsvenskarkeologi.se](http://www.sydsvenskarkeologi.se)).

The second stage of investigation at Degeberga had the following aims.

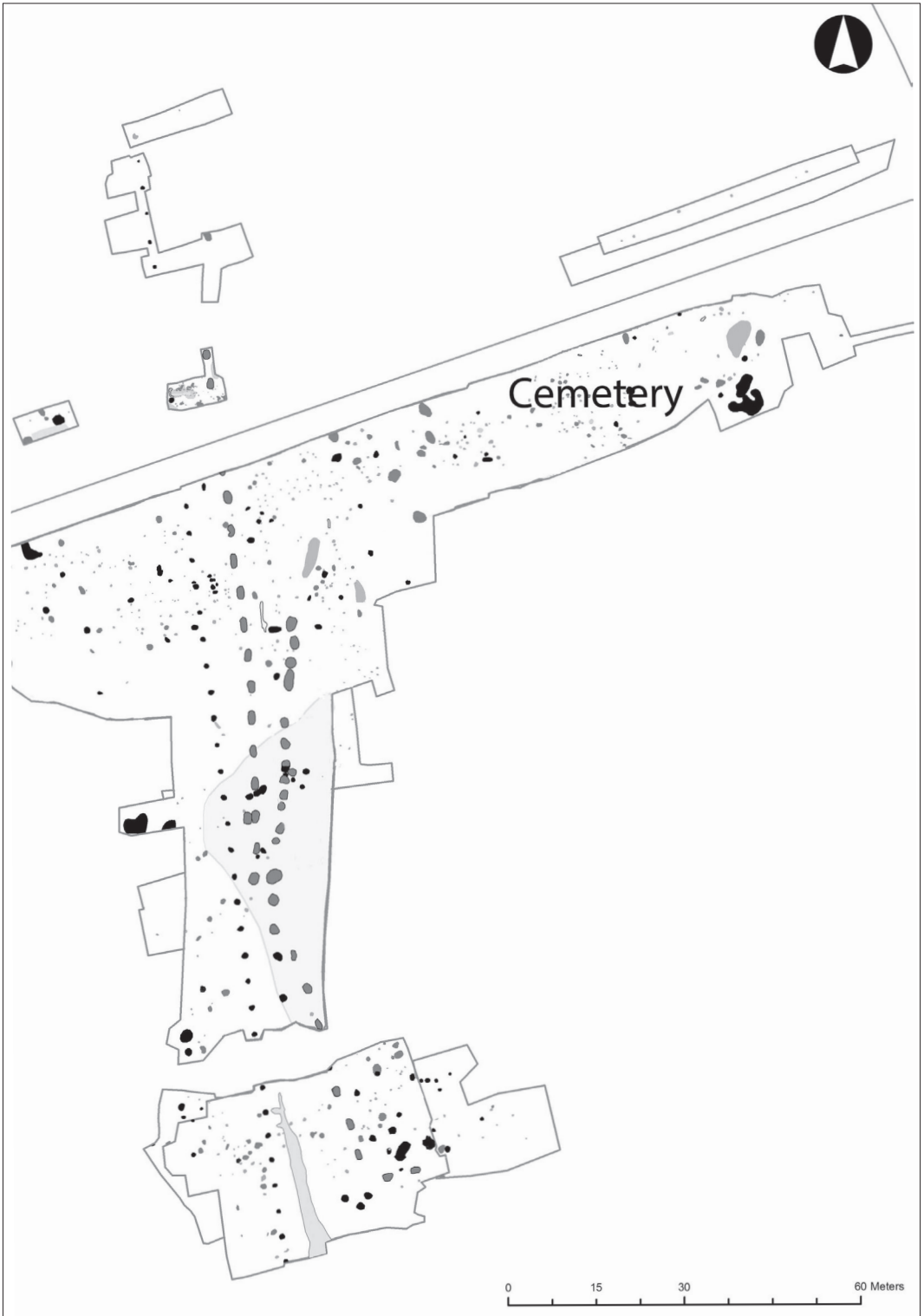
- To find out whether there were visible traces of the sunken lane, or other features of the linear structure, on the steep southern slope towards the Forsakar stream.
- To determine if the row of postholes surrounded an area, or if it was a directional monument pointing toward something – e.g. a grave monument.
- To establish the structure's dimensions, how long the row of postholes was, primarily to the north and south.
- To investigate if it was possible to see clear changes in the monument over its various phases.
- To define the chronology more clearly.
- To better understand the function of the various parts of the monument.
- To get a better idea of the size, extent and use period of the cemetery.

To shed light on these questions we used visual inspection of the area, magnetometry, metal detection, excavation and analysis of tree species and radiocarbon.

The various field operations of 2013 took place within a prospecting area of 65 000 m<sup>2</sup>. The fieldwork started with a magnetometer survey, which unfortunately could not trace the structures we sought. A metal detector survey was conducted next to the cemetery investigated in 2011. This was also without success. The poor result of the magnetometer survey was given an explanation when we dug search trenches to the north of the Lillafors road. Intensive agriculture has re-sculpted the terrain and caused extensive erosion.

We dug twelve rather small trenches with a total extent of 1330 m<sup>2</sup> (fig. 1). We also investigated an additional number of features in our old trenches, which were still open since the excavations of 2011. In all trenches except one, features of a prehistoric character were found. Note however that the trenches to the north of the Lillafors road, next to the central plateau, contained very few features and artefacts, and we did not find

Fig. 1. The Degeberga site with trenches and features from the 2011 and 2013 excavations.





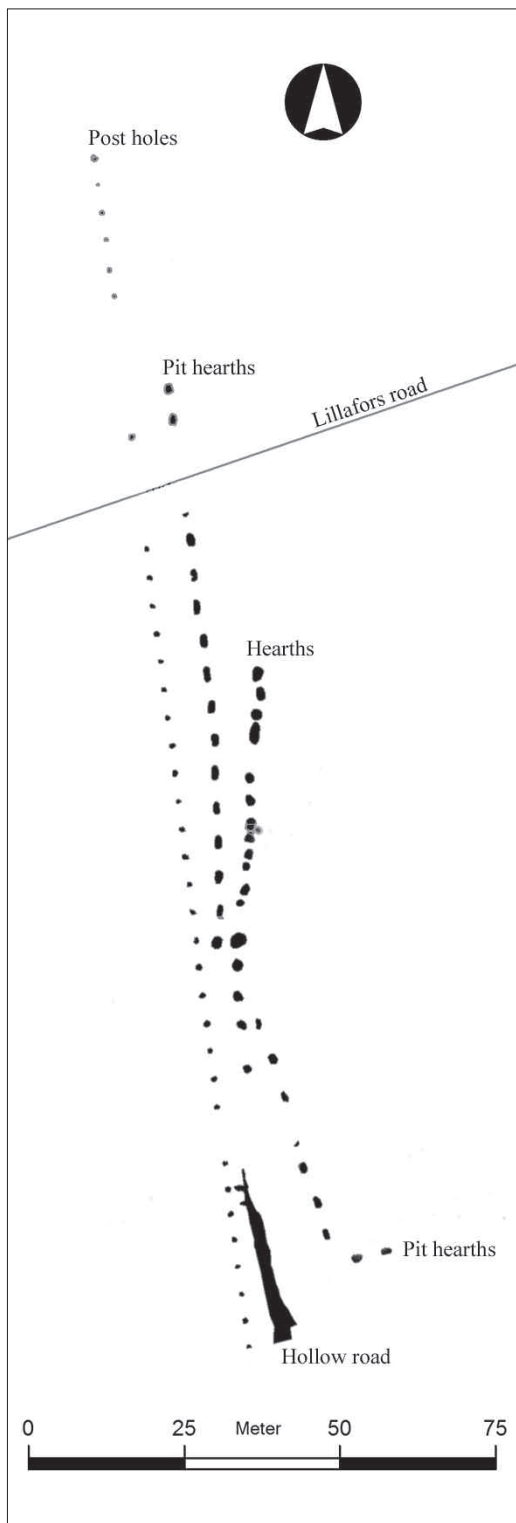


Fig. 2. The Degeberga monument as far as it is known today. Hearths represent phase 1, pit hearths and post holes represent phase 2.

any additional graves. Agriculture and erosion has worn down the top of the hill. Postholes and other features grew more and more shallow the further north we excavated. Only the bottom part of the postholes and the pit hearths were left in the northern trenches. We could nevertheless establish that the post row continued in a straight line in a north-north-westerly direction, and that it was at least 190 m long. We reinterpreted the row of pits as a row of pit hearths, which had been much longer than previously believed. We had believed that its southern part belonged to the eastern, curved row of hearths from the Roman Period (fig. 2). New dates clarified that the southernmost features belonged to the row of pit hearths and that this structure dates from the Migration Period. We could follow it for a short distance north of the Lillafors road, and found that it had been at least 150 m long in total.

Due to the severe erosion and the fact that the features gradually became more and more shallow to the north, we could not determine whether the rows had continued, changed course or ended at that point. This remains to be clarified. Nor is it clear how the rows continued to the south, as part of this area has been dramatically remodelled by a railway embankment in the 19th century. Part of it is also in a nature preserve, making an excavation permit difficult to get. The row of pit hearths seems to change course to the east, but no continuation could be confirmed after the two last ones, which were placed at almost a right angle to the rest of the row (fig. 2). As mentioned above, only the bottoms of the observed pit hearths were preserved in this south-eastern part of the area; some of these may have been disturbed by ploughing and erosion, as they were in the northern part of the structure.

Analysis of plant macrofossils and tree species in a selection of soil samples from Iron Age features identified charcoal from willow, hazel, birch, pine and oak, along with fragments of burnt cereal grains, probably barley. In addition to these plant species, samples analysed after the 2011 season

contained charcoal from ash and burnt grains of hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare* var. *vulgare*). There seems to have been a quite a variety of trees in the area and the main cultivated crop, or perhaps the crop selected for ritual use, was hulled barley. There are a number of source-critical problems, though. For instance, the selected samples came from special features, the preservation conditions of this site were poor and, especially, environmental issues were not at all decisive when we collected the soil samples. The primary purpose of the analysis has so far exclusively been to obtain material for dating with as low an intrinsic age as possible.

Eight radiocarbon analyses were done on material from the 2013 excavation. The results are well in line with the dates from the 2011 season. The dates are related to the Late Bronze Age settlement remains and to features included in the linear structure, which has been dated to a period extending from the Late Roman to the Middle Vendel Period. In aggregate, the radiocarbon dates allow us to determine the phases of the monument much more clearly than before. An especially important sample was taken from a cow's jaw found in a posthole under a large stone that had fallen after the post had collapsed or been removed. A tooth from the jaw was dated to 570–660 cal AD (2 sigma, UBA-24678, 1425±28 BP), that is, the Early or Middle Vendel Period. Therefore, the posts appear to have been fairly long-lived; each can be estimated to have lasted for about 100 years (Wickberg 2014a). The first phase of the monument consisted of a curved row of hearths, which was made during the Late Roman Iron Age. The second phase consisted of two parallel rows of pit hearths and posts, made during the Migration Period. The structure was abandoned, or maintenance ended, some time in the first half of the Vendel Period, most probably the early 7th century cal AD (Björk & Wickberg 2014 p. 28 ff).

In summary, we found that the linear structures extended further north, at least 190 m in total. The row of pit hearths continued south and then probably turned east. Radiocarbon now gives a much better idea of the use during the various phases of the monument. Furthermore, the dating shows that the rows of posts and pit hearths were

constructed during very short periods, probably representing one or two brief events. These results are valuable, not only to determine when and how this particular linear structure was built, but also to make valid comparisons with other sites, which we will turn to in the following.

#### *The Degeberga monument in its local context*

The Degeberga monument was a highly visible structure. It was meant to be experienced both from near and far. About 500 m northwest of the monument, eleven large flat stone grave markers (7–18 m in diameter) bear witness to settlement nearby of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (Raä Ö Sönnarslöv 247:1–2, 248:1, 249:1–3, 250:1–3, 251:1–2). Remains of a sunken lane passes between some of these grave monuments (Raä Ö Sönnarslöv 249:2). A cupmark boulder shows another dimension of the sacral environment (Raä Ö Sönnarslöv 251:3).

One kilometre to the west of the linear structure are a burial mound and two flat stone grave markers (Raä Degeberga 56:1, 58:1–2), and here we find the 1st millennium AD place name *Borråkra*. Both of these grave clusters are some ways up the slope of the Linderödsåsen ridge, which is partly wooded and abounds in boulders. Nearby are two large areas with fossil fields, also containing a number of flat stone grave markers.

A final grave is one kilometre north-east of the Degeberga monument. It is a barrow named Torshög (“Thor’s mound”, Raä Degeberga 15: 1), which is 15 m in diameter and 2 m high. It dates most likely from the Early Bronze Age, but has never been excavated. It is in a widely sightlined spot along one of the old north-south roads shown on early maps. The sunken lane and the nearest graves are located on more level ground above steep slopes. Below the main hill extends an undulating landscape of sandy and easily worked soil. The Degeberga monument was on one of these hills. The Roman Period cemetery next to it has yielded no traces of superstructures or other markers, though of course this does not exclude the possibility that there once were such.

Both the graves and the linear monument suggest that the strategically positioned and widely sightlined site must have had great significance during the Iron Age. It is a place that many people



Fig. 3. Ancient monuments at Degeberga, mentioned in the text. A) The linear structure and Roman Iron Age cemetery. B) Cemetery with stone ship and standing stones. C) Viking Period/ Early Medieval cemetery. D) Medieval church.

must have passed, probably a crossroads. It is near watercourses, where many types of landscape meet. For some reason the importance of the site seems to have diminished, or the centre of gravity drifted, from the Vendel Period on. About 500 m east of the linear structure and the cemetery is another cemetery with standing stones, probably the remains of stone ships (Raä Degeberga 13:1). The second phase of the linear monument, c. AD 400–600, seems to precede or coincide with the establishment of this cemetery. Today it retains only badly damaged stone structures, with the probable stone ship setting and an additional eleven scattered standing stones within the current village (fig. 3). This cemetery has seen no excavations, but the monument types belong to the Migration and Vendel Periods (Carlie 1994). This suggests that the sacred area, and probably the settlement, grew or moved somewhat towards the east during these centuries.

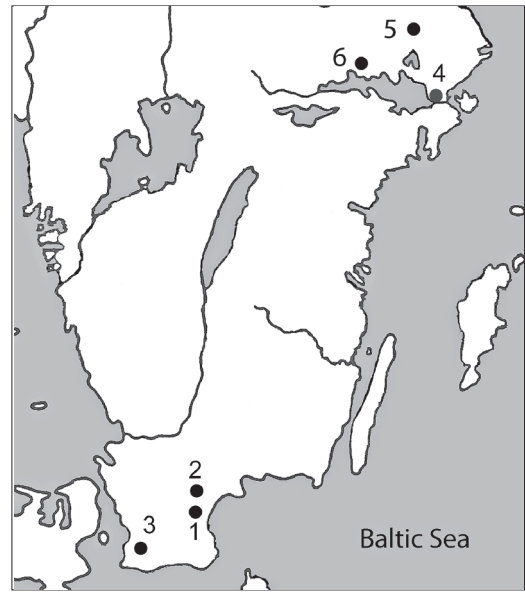
Another 200 m to the east, a cemetery with at least five inhumation graves from the Viking Period and probably the Early Medieval Period, were discovered when a house was built in 1931 (Hansen 1931; Raä Degeberga 73:1). This suggests a continued growth or movement of the sacred area towards the east. The High Medieval village and church in Degeberga were eventually estab-

lished on the slope to the south of the pagan cemeteries. The ancient settlement sites, the cemeteries and the grand monument were forgotten and the ground was used for pasture and cultivation for generations. On the oldest maps of the Degeberga and its lands, from the 18th and 19th centuries, is an evident field boundary in exactly the same location and on the same orientation as the rows of posts and pit hearths, at least until the agricultural reform of 1813. After that, the border was finally wiped out, after having been a structuring element in the landscape for about 1300 years (Lantmäteriet, 11-DEG-6). It is fascinating to see that the linear mark lived on in the landscape for so long, although the monument and all awareness of it had been gone for ages.

#### *Comparison with other sites*

The Degeberga structure is difficult to understand when viewed only from the information gathered on site. It must be compared to similar structures elsewhere. We have previously emphasised the strong similarities in structure and date between the linear monuments at Degeberga, Önsvala, Old Uppsala and Anundshög (Björk & Wickberg 2013, p. 101 ff; see also Larsson 1982; Sanmark & Semple 2011; Beronius Jörpeland et

Fig. 4. Map showing the location of the discussed sites with linear structures. 1) Degeberga. 2) Färlöv. 3) Önsvala. 4) Tomteboda. 5) Old Uppsala. 6) Anundshög.



al. 2013). With the new dates from the 2013 fieldwork at Degeberga and after further research, the connections between Degeberga and Önsvala have been strengthened and we have also become aware of two additional sites: Färlöv in Scania and Tomteboda near Stockholm (fig. 4).

At Önsvala south of Lund, a cemetery threatened by a gravel pit was excavated in 1968–70 (Raä Nevishög 1). The site is about 500 m north of the small river Torrebergabäcken and the graves belong to a period from the Late Roman Iron Age up to the Viking Period. Some 50 m to the south-east the cemetery was flanked by a 50 m long row of twelve rectangular pits or hearths at almost equal distances to each other. In average the distance from centre to centre was 4.2 m, compared to Degeberga where the average was 5.1 m, centre to centre. Two of the pit hearths were radiocarbon dated to the Late Roman and Migration Periods (Lu-671, 1590±50 BP; Lu-672, 1600±50 BP – see fig. 7). About 25 m east of the row of hearths was a parallel trench, and a further 15 m to the east was a parallel depression, at least 60 m long and up to 7 m wide, with a partly sooty fill that may have been the remains of a road. The function of these features has not been previously determined, and their interpretation is uncertain. On the bottom of the presumed road depres-

sion were seven hearths, and the fill contained pottery ranging from the Neolithic to the Iron Age (Larsson 1982; 2013; Björk 2005, p. 96 f, 197; Björk & Wickberg 2013).

In Färlöv, north-west of Kristianstad, part of a cemetery was excavated in 1996–98. Smaller excavations have also taken place on three later occasions (Raä Färlöv 1, 2, 4, 7, 166). The cemetery has proved to consist of several groups of burial monuments on a ridge alongside an approximately 500 m long section of an ancient road. The excavated part of the cemetery (Raä 1) is the northernmost part of a much larger grave complex. During excavation of a small section of this northern part, several interesting finds were made of high status burials and monuments. Among them were a richly equipped weapon burial from the Late Roman Iron Age (phase C1b), remains of two extremely large stone ships from the Vendel or Early Viking Periods, and a rune stone of similar date. The stone ships had been of monumental size, about 50 and 80 m long respectively. Another structure found was a row of seven large postholes, extending along a 20 m long widely sightlined spot in the centre of the cemetery. The postholes measured 0.80–1.32 m in diameter and 0.46–0.92 m in depth. The distance between them was about 2.9 m, centre to centre, and they all



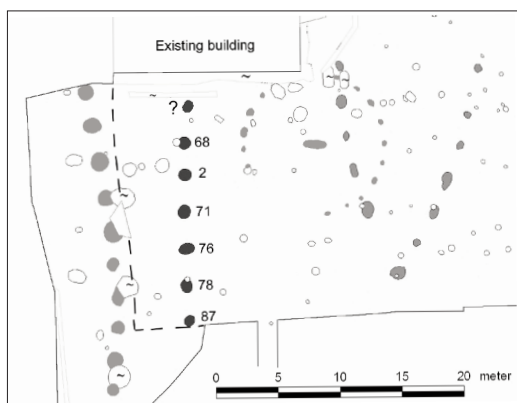


Fig. 5. Excerpt of the plan of the cemetery section excavated at Färlöv in 1997. Black features are large postholes, grey ones parts of burial monuments, white ones are other features. Features labeled with a prone S are modern disturbances. The feature labeled with a question mark was severely damaged. The dashed line marks the dividing line between an area to the west where only the topsoil could be removed, and an area east of it that where the features were excavated.

had a massive stone lining (figs 5–6). Charcoal from one of the postholes was dated to the Early to Middle Vendel Period (Lu-4283,  $1420 \pm 70$  BP – see fig. 7). The current road, running in a north-south direction along the west side of the cemetery, exists on the oldest map of the area from 1684. The rune stone stood beside this road. The row of posts runs in the same direction as the road, but at a distance of about 25 m to the east (Björk 1999; 2005; 2010; Nilsson 2014; Wickberg 2014b). Today, the village of Färlöv is dominated by a large Romanesque church with twin towers. Not very long ago, remains of an Early Medieval manor were found just west of the church (Kockum 2009). There are thus several manifest expressions of status and power in the area, covering a long period, well into historical times. The site has a strategic location, and, to all appearances it had a considerable economic significance. Finds of status markers and the monuments on the site are probably the result of a situation where those who controlled this important geographic position, at a watershed between different economic zones and important land and water ways, also controlled and profited on communication and trade in the area (Helgesson 2003, p. 329 ff).

Degeberga has clear traits in common with both Önsvala and Färlöv. With Önsvala the common feature is the row of pit hearths and with Färlöv it is the row of extraordinarily large postholes. The dates of Degeberga, Önsvala and Färlöv agree extremely well. The rows of pit hearths

are dated unambiguously to the Migration Period, while the rows of posts are dated to the Early to Middle Vendel Period, with dates for the construction of the monument's first phase and the abandonment of its second phase (fig. 7). There is thus no doubt that there are strong links between these sites, both in terms of the regular layout and in how the pit hearths and postholes are arranged, as well as in the dates and in what kind of environments the structures are found.

There is yet another site with a linear structure that deserves attention in connection with Degeberga. It is a cemetery from the Migration and Vendel Periods at Tomtebodå just north of Stockholm (Raä Solna 39), excavated in 2001 (Hamilton 2003). The cemetery was on a south-facing slope towards Lake Ulvsundasjön, which is part of Lake Mälaren. 24 graves and other features were excavated including mounds, flat stone grave markers, an unmarked inhumation and a standing-stone circle (Sw. domarring). They were richly furnished with beads, tools, combs, weaponry etc. and belong to the period AD 400–800.

During fieldwork, fragments of three picture stones made from red sandstone were found. At least one of them has runes on the narrow sides. The runes are of the early 24-character runic alphabet, but only three can be read: “E R U”. This find of early runes on a picture stone is unique in the Mälaren area. It dates from the Migration Period. The fragments were spread out in secondary positions, mostly in the stone fill of grave markers from the subsequent Vendel

Fig. 6. Left: section through feature O71, one of the postholes in the row at the Färlöv cemetery. Photo by Anders Edring. Right: Thomas Linderoth next to the section through posthole 5250 at Degeberga. Photo Tony Björk.

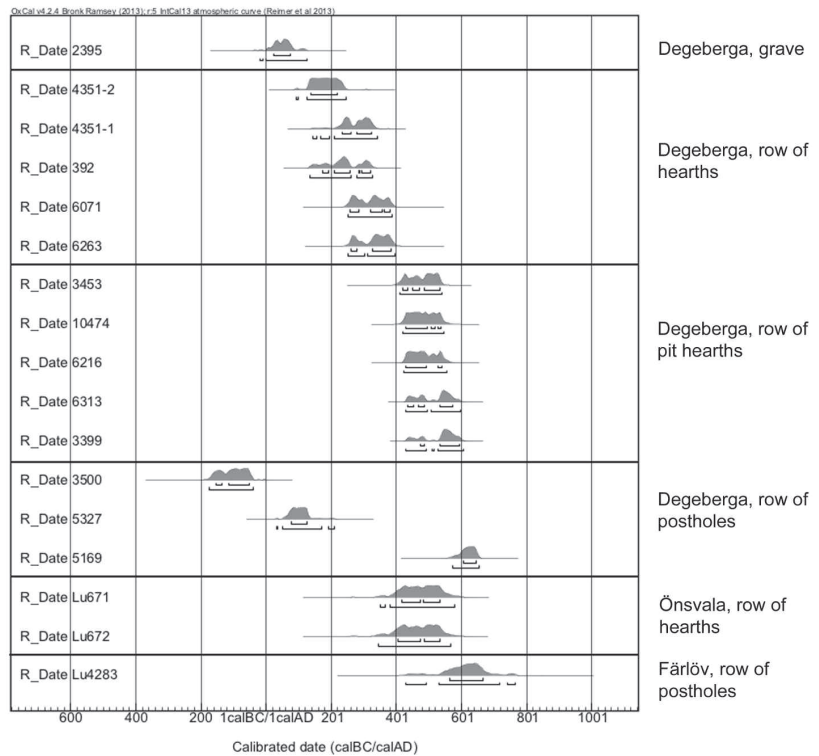


Period. The picture stones had been destroyed already during the Early Vendel Period (Hamilton 2003, p. 9 f). This suggests that there was a takeover of power at this time by other people than the descendants of those who had erected the picture stones (Fischer 2005, p. 226).

A row of postholes was also found at Tomte-

boda. It was 53 m long, oriented west-south-west to east-south-east, and located in the south-west part of the cemetery. The row was discovered when the excavation of the graves had finished and the entire excavated area was dug slightly deeper. The postholes were placed regularly about 4.7 metres apart, centre to centre, except for an

Fig. 7. Radiocarbon analyses from Degeberga, Önsvala and Färlöv. Note that the dates of the pit hearths at Degeberga and Önsvala correspond very well, as do the dates of the postholes at Degeberga and Färlöv.



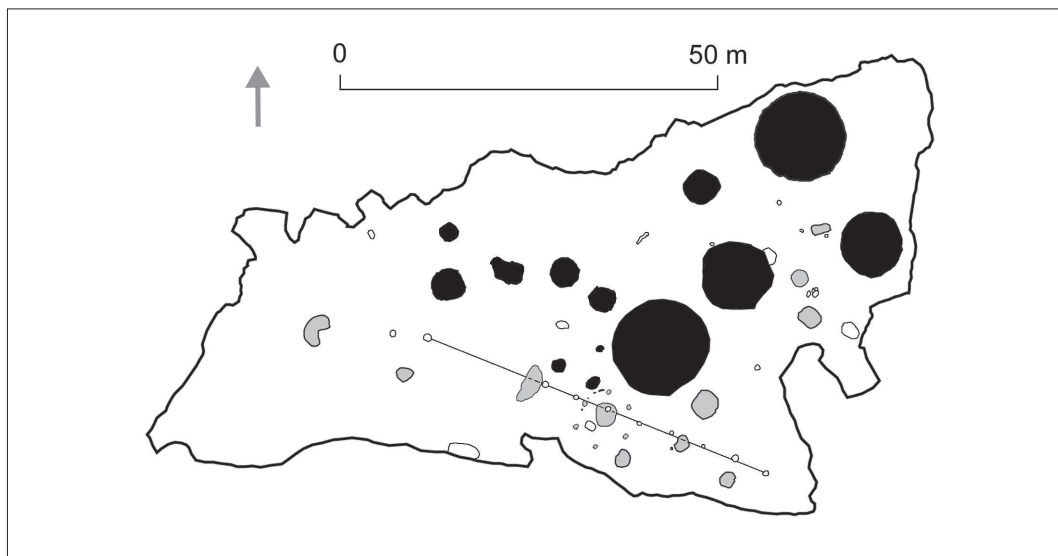


Fig. 8. The Tomtebodavägen cemetery. Black features are Migration Period graves, grey ones Vendel Period graves. The row of postholes is emphasised with a notional line. Map based on information and maps in Hamilton 2003.

area in the north-western part where recent digging had probably destroyed three postholes (fig. 8). One of the postholes was covered by a cremation layer belonging to the standing-stone circle, which the finds date to the 8th century AD (Hamilton 2005, p. 41). Three other postholes were covered by stone markers belonging to other Vendel Period graves. The postholes in the central part of the row were shallower than the rest, which indicates that they had been damaged in connection with the construction of graves (Hamilton 2003, p. 43). All the postholes were lined with stones. The largest was 0.70 m deep, with a massive stone lining. The posthole farthest to the west was 0.55 m deep and 0.90 m in diameter at the surface. Almost nothing was found in the postholes (Hamilton 2003, p. 43).

We suggest that this row of posts was coeval with the cemetery's Migration Period phase, since it demarcated the south-south-western part of the cemetery at that time. The posts must have been removed during the Early Vendel Period since the postholes had been covered by Vendel Period graves. There seems to have been a continuation in the distribution and direction of the

later graves, as they continued to follow the direction of the row of posts in a west-north-west to east-south-east direction when laid out. This implies that they followed a road running in this direction. The broken picture stones were found in and around several of the graves superimposed on the postholes. Just to the north-east of it, a number of small fragments of sandstone of the same kind were found (Hamilton 2003, p. 25). These small fragments may represent the spot where the picture stones were broken apart. They may have stood in the immediate vicinity.

It cannot be determined whether the row of postholes followed a road, like the ones on the other sites, as no traces of a road were discovered. We consider it likely. Indications of the will to communicate with people moving in the landscape, on land or on water, can be seen in the sight-lining of the cemetery, the picture stones, the alignment of the row of posts and the distribution of the Vendel Period graves. The position of the site was strategic by the side of a bay in one of entry channels to Lake Mälaren, which was a vital part of a vast communication network. There must also have been important transportation routes

on land in the area. The picture stones and the runic inscription are unusual finds, and the combination is unique. This speaks of a social environment in the area during the Migration Period which was clearly far out of the ordinary.

Earlier research has pointed out the Solna area as especially interesting during the Viking Period, judging by rune stones and hoards of gold and silver. There are many indications of a central importance during the Migration and Vendel Periods too (Hamilton 2005). After the Viking Age too, in the Early Medieval Period, the area seems to have maintained a special position with the building of a fortified round church in the 12th century. This was another expression of power, possibly with offensive intention (Hamilton 2005, p. 50). Part of a rune stone has been bricked into the church. But about AD 1250 at the time of the foundation of Stockholm, there seems to have been a shift in power, or in its location, and the Solna area no longer saw expressions of any special status (Hamilton 2005, p. 51).

We were intrigued to find an almost exact parallel of the postholes in the row at Degeberga with those at Tomtebodå (fig. 9). This is the case both in the size of the postholes and the distance between them. At Degeberga, the distance from centre to centre was about 4.6 m. At Tomtebodå it was about 4.7 m. Without a doubt, Tomtebodå must be counted as another example of these linear structures, just like the ones at Degeberga, Fårlöv, Önsvala, Old Uppsala and Anundshög. Having said this, we will attempt the difficult task of a closer interpretation of what these linear structures represent and what they tell us about the places where they have been encountered. The risk of circular reasoning is great, but we ask the reader to bear with us in stretching the material in our attempt, as we are treading new ground.

#### *Connecting rituals, power and territories*

Degeberga and the other sites described have many things in common. Tab. 1 presents the parameters that we consider central. The sites broadly follow a common pattern. The rows of postholes were absolutely straight with a strict geometry, they were located at large cemeteries (often with high-status graves) at important roads and they represent the same timeframe, c. 200–600 AD.

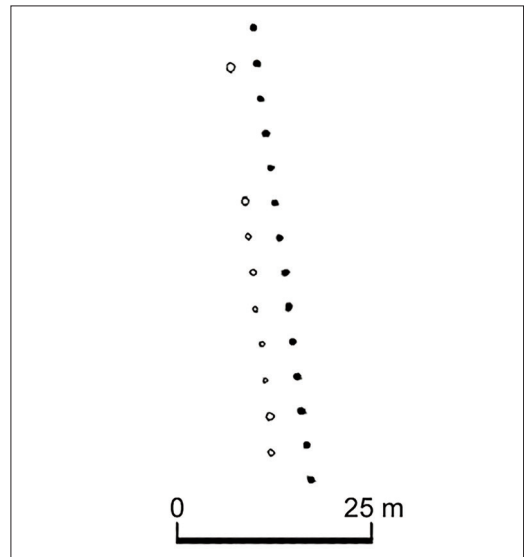


Fig. 9. Comparison plan showing the almost exact correlation between the postholes in the Tomtebodå row and part of the Degeberga row. Tomtebodå to the left (unfilled), Degeberga to the right (filled).

The rows of posts have flanked roads and must have symbolised something that was evident at the time. They do not seem to have functioned as any kind of fortification, as the posts were sparsely spaced and no traces have been seen of anything that could have linked them together. A symbolic, probably ritual marking seems more probable, but a territorial marking could also have been part of the purpose. The widespread Swedish sites known today share so many close similarities that they must represent a shared idea of why and how to present and regulate certain places.

Why were the post rows built and what was their ideational background? We have suggested that their origin may go back to the so called fire cult sites, with single or double rows of hearths or pit hearths, of the Late Bronze and Pre-Roman Iron Ages (Björk & Wickberg 2013, p. 104 f). These are found in northern Germany and Poland, Denmark and southern Sweden (Heidelk-Schacht 1989; Thörn 1993; Nordqvist 2005; Hulth 2013). The fire cult sites apparently changed in a profound way during the 4th and 5th centuries AD. Degeberga offers the clearest example of this change in the structure of the sites. Here we see a



	Degeberga	Färlöv	Önsvala	Tomtebodå	Old Uppsala	Anundshög
Row of posts	X	X		X	X	X
Row of pit hearths	X		X		?	?
Close to cemetery	X	X	X	X	X	X
High status graves		X	X	X	X	X
Old road/s – sunken lane/s	X	?	?		X	X
Ford	?				?	X

Tab. 1. Comparison of common features at the discussed sites. The question marks represent probable presence, while blank fields represent absence or unknown.

direct continuity between the early and late monument type, while several of the other linear monuments seem to have been newly established in the Late Roman or Migration Period.

Under the influence of the Roman Empire, Scandinavians probably acquired ideas about how to structure space to achieve certain goals. After the collapse of the empire, this led to a hybridization of the ancient custom of fire cult places. The tradition lived on in an altered form. Old ways of constructing rows of hearths and pit hearths in complex variations of more or less even rows and clusters were transformed into strict straight lines followed by equally strict rows of posts. Rows of wooden poles recall stone pillars or columns in strict rows. In any case, the role as a demarcation or frame for the ritual area obviously lived on, but the meaning and the message these structures mediated probably changed to some extent. They seem to have kept their role as an important component of ritual arenas where collective memories were created. But the extremely evident regulation suggests that the transformation aimed to clarify elements of control – that is, political and economic power with strong territorial claims. Thereby the layout connected to history, while it also legitimised a new political order (Björk & Wickberg 2013, p. 106).

The political and economic connections among the sites with linear monuments are emphasised by their many shared traits regarding vital communication routes, chronology and, not least, high-status environments. It has been suggested that they had a multifunctional significance, connecting to a broad spectrum of social, religious, judiciary and political spheres (Björk &

Wickberg 2013, p. 105 f; Beronius Jörpeland et al. 2013, p. 280; 2015, p. 4 f).

This touches upon many of the social functions associated with Scandinavian central places and likewise with the much older continental *oppida* (Helgesson 2002, p. 22 ff; Fernández-Götz 2014, p. 182). The combination of the aforementioned traits allows us to view the sites as rooted in a context of centrality, from a power perspective. Social power can be described as networks built out of four overlapping types of power – the military, political, economic and ideological (Bossen 2006, p. 95). Several of the ingredients of such a power network seem to have left lasting imprints on the sites with linear monuments.

The construction of the long rows of posts required an organisation involving many people. Such a coordination of labour requires trust or direct control, which in turn points towards an element of power. The regulated sites can tentatively be seen as a step in the concentration of power at the transition to the Late Iron Age in Scandinavia. A common interpretation of the changes seen at this stage is that military power became concentrated to warlords and their retinue. It depended on personal alliances and unions, e.g. dynastic marriages, representing a step in a process where stronger and stronger territorial claims and boundaries were asserted (Ystgaard 2013, p. 45 f, 258 ff).

Hillforts are also relevant when a power perspective with strong emphasis on military and political conditions is adopted. These are rare in Scania, which gives us no clues, but there are none close to the sites with rows of posts in Uppland either, where hillforts are common. Many

Norwegian hillforts are also in peripheral locations in relation to the primary settlements. Thus it has been suggested that many of them should be seen as defensive points for local warlords, rather than as central places in a territory. Their interpretation is however not clear, and the status of individual sites probably varied (e.g. Skre 1998, p. 285 ff; Rundkvist 2011, p. 32 w. refs). Another point of view is that the Migration Period hillforts were part of a “landscape of mobility where transit through it was the most important guiding principle, rather than control of it from one central point. At the same time, the hillforts may be understood as an expression of a stage in a process where a stronger tendency to asserting territory develops” (Ystgaard 2013, p. 294 f w. refs, our translation). An outlook that attaches importance to mobility and transit agrees well with the observations made around the rows of posts, which always seem to have a close connection to important roads.

From a power perspective it has been assumed that Färlöv was closely connected to the major central place Vå on the Kristianstad plain (Björk 1999; 2003; Helgesson 2002; 2003). With the observed similarities between Färlöv and Degeberga, the latter should also be brought into the discussion about the political landscape in north-east Scania. Degeberga and Färlöv are not far apart, 27 km as the crow flies, but located on either side of the Kristianstad plain. However, there is not only a geographical proximity. Both sites are located on the periphery of the plain where the landscape rises, in zones that are perceived as the beginning of border areas towards other territories. Moreover, both Degeberga and Färlöv are situated along the ancient road from northern to south-eastern Scania (present-day road 19). The similarities in the layouts, in the topographical positions and the locations along the same vital communication link, suggest to us that there was more than one connection between these places. The 1684 map shows that Vå is not only located in a central part of the area, but also at the midpoint of this important stretch of road (fig. 10). Another important site on this road is Lyngsjö, seat of the Gärd *herred* judicial assembly until 1765 (Nilson 1984). None of these sites was randomly placed in the landscape. They are in strate-



Fig. 10. Part of north-eastern Scania from Gerhard Buhman's 1684 map of Scania. Mentioned sites are marked with circles. Note the positions, listed from the south, of Degeberga, Lyngsjö, Vå and Färlöv along the current road 19. The road's course just north of Vå was probably broken and changed with the foundation of the town of Kristianstad at royal initiative in the beginning of the 17th century.

gic positions, at crossroads of important communication routes and often at fords or bridges. All four sites are on the same vital route in the district's infrastructure – road 19 – which confirms that this road played an important role for those who had ambitions to control the area, not only in recent centuries but also further back in time. The connection between the road and the sites is so strong that they appear to be among each other's preconditions.

We find just as strong a connection to important roads at the grand sites of Old Uppsala and Anundshög. But these two also have something else in common, an element not known from the Scanian sites: the enormous barrows. This extremely evident monumentality is the particular charac-

teristic of these sites today. At least in the case of Old Uppsala, the role of the site as the region's top-level central place in terms of both politic and religious functions is undisputed.

Olof Sundqvist (2013, p. 96 ff) has suggested that the cult of several gods, as known from written sources at Old Uppsala, may have been a strategy of ruling that made it possible to gather people from a larger area, even though their regional/local cult practices may have had different emphases. A cult site interweaving the cult of deities with that of dead rulers gave a special legitimacy to the power of the leading family. When considering the establishment of rulers' seats, with direct relation to places of worship and burial that legitimised power, the step is not far to view these sites, situated in infrastructurally and topographically strategic locations, as making specific claims to land areas.

We obviously do not see the same kind of extreme monumentality at Degeberga and Tomtebodas as at Anundshög and Old Uppsala. The regional symbolic language differs however, and in South Scandinavian terms Färlöv should also be considered extremely monumental with its very large stone ships. In any case, there were picture stones, a stone circle and several other grave monuments at Tomtebodas; standing stones, very large stone ships, a small mound or flatter grave marker and a rune stone at Färlöv; and at least the remains of stone ships at Degeberga. We recognise these monuments from the Lake Mälaren area: particularly the large stone ships and rune stone at Anundshög. They can be considered manifestations of the same desire to be seen. Through their sheer sizes, they signal that the sites were in the hands of people with the wish and means to display the importance of their ancestors and themselves. Stone ships of over 40 m in length have a pronounced monumentality and Torsten Capelle (1986, p. 16) suggested that they may not primarily have been seen as funerary monuments, but rather as memorials to great seafarers. We are well into the Vendel Period when the huge mounds and ship settings are constructed on these sites and thus at a stage when the rows of posts had become outdated. These sites had entered their next phase of transformation, through new visual attributes.

Svante Fischer (2005) offers a thought-provoking description of social conditions at a time just before the erection of the rows of posts. These may in fact reveal an influence from the Roman Empire. In Fischer's interpretation, Germanic warriors trained in the Roman military machine and participating in Roman wars brought their experiences back to their home areas. After the collapse of the West Roman Empire, a "curious blend of Roman imperialism and Germanic *imitatio Imperii*" grew up. This led to a "regression of society under a criminal social order", which some researchers discussing socio-economic organisation during the Migration Period have called a "looting economy" (*Plünderungsökonomie*). Fischer instead calls it *kleptocracy*. On the continent, the empires of the kleptocrats were violent and usually short-lived. Few survived for more than a couple of generations (Fischer 2005, p. 119 ff). Should we see the establishment of the sites with the rows of posts in this light? As manifestations of a reestablishment of a stable power structure? Environments with linear monuments might be interpreted as a reflection of the establishment, legitimisation and stabilisation of regional networks of power after the tumultuous period following the collapse of Western Rome. This was a time when the basis for political systems was transformed completely, with a change in the supply of various attractive goods, new routes and new alliances. This was followed by a consolidation manifested by large burial monuments, which may also be seen as an expression of the emergence of a Nordic identity during the Vendel Period, increasingly culturally isolated from much of Christian Europe (Helgesson 2002, p. 38).

There is much to suggest that the sites we discuss played a multifaceted role. Some it seems had several functions, while others appear to have had fewer. It is clear that the rows of posts were erected in places that were of vital importance to control. The similarities between the sites show that they were built by people with far-reaching contacts and the same kind of ambitions (Wickberg 2014a). Everything indicates that they were places of regional importance, even though they seem to represent different organizational levels and functions. Old Uppsala and

Anundshög probably represent important power manifestations at core points in the domains of the ruling families. We that Degeberga, Önsvala, Färlöv and Tomteboda represented a lower hierarchical level, controlled by close relatives or allies of the ruling families, and were key parts of both the power network and the physical road network of larger areas. At some of the sites with Migration Period rows of posts, the power function obviously lived on with evident political, economic and ideological attributes long after the Iron Age (Beronius Jörpeland et al. 2015). The clearest examples of this are Old Uppsala and Färlöv where continued elite activity is seen into the 12th century.

Finally, we believe that our initial interpretation of the linear monuments (Björk & Wickberg 2013) has been further strengthened by a widened basis for dating and by additional comparisons with Färlöv and Tomteboda. Some of the differences probably reflect varying local circumstances and differences in the importance of each individual site, but altogether the detailed similarities noted cannot be coincidences. We find that the evidence strongly suggests that the sites represent multifunctional places of regional importance, reflecting ideas, perceptions and goals common among politically and militarily influential upper-stratum groups, over a large part of Scandinavia around AD 400–650.

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