Introduction to a medieval arena

The Skramle farmstead, central to this paper, is located in the county of Värmland, north of lake Vänern in western Sweden. Today, the county of Värmland has about 300,000 inhabitants, with almost 140,000 of them in the Karlstad region (Karlstad is the largest city in the area). Almost 80% of the county is forested and 8% is arable. The forests are consequently of the greatest importance for the industry and people in the region.

Fairly little is known of medieval Värmland. Written sources are scarce and most of our knowledge is based on archaeological and historical studies that was carried out during the 1980s and early 1990s. Older research focused on the construction and history of churches. The county belonged to the medieval diocese of Skara, which also included the province of Västergötland. Similarities between churches can subsequently be traced in the two regions. But there are also a lot of differences, especially the building material. In Värmland, it was more common to build the churches in wood. There where no monasteries in the county, but the monastic system had great interest in the area, especially the salmon fisheries. Vänern and the streams and rivers in the region were rich in salmon. This was exploited by the crown and the monasteries from early times onwards. Several of the farms located along the rivers were subsequently owned by several Swedish monasteries and convents.

Värmland also included a judicial district, with a provincial law. The code of law does not exist today, but we have indications that it resembled the law which has been preserved for the province of Västergötland. There are remains of three medieval fortifications in Värmland: Amneholm, Edsholm and Saxholmen. The latter two have recently been the subject of archaeological investigations during the 1990s. These strongholds have been erected for different reasons, in different periods. There were no towns in the northern part of the lake Vänern area. The first town, Karlstad, was founded in 1564. Medieval markets and fairs are documented, most of them however in sources from the 16th and 17th centuries. Among these places we find: Tingvalla (today the city of Karlstad), Knusesund (today called Säffle) and Bro (today called Kristinehamn). Tingvalla is documented in written sources from the 13th century and it is said to be a central place and common meeting place for trade in Värmland.

Archaeological investigations in the central parts of the city have not, however, revealed any agglomeration or settlement dating from before the 17th century. Knusesund and Bro are not mentioned in medieval records, but during the 16th century they are described as old market-places. Hence, there are source critical problems concerning early history of these places.

That Värmland is a forested province is visible in the range of goods that are mentioned in the early period i.a. hides, timber and iron. The importance of the iron rose during the late medieval period. These products were also exchanged for corn, salt and fish.

The arena of investigation: the Gunnarskog parish

The Gunnarskog parish is characterised by the waterways running from north to south, with the settlement located close to the water. Most of the parish is covered with forest. The parish is mentioned for the first time in historical sources in 1376 and was at that time an annex to the nearby Arvika parish (Ortmannen i Värmlands lån 1942, 39). Next time the parish is mentioned is in the land register of 1503 (Samuelsson & Kallstenius 1939). Our knowledge of ancient monuments in Gunnarskog, as well as in the rest of Värmland and Sweden, is based on the survey of ancient monuments carried out by The Central Board of National Antiquities. The first survey in Gunnarskog parish was done in the 1960s. Eleven ancient monuments were found at that time. The second survey was done by the authors in 1989 and the number increased to 800. A majority of the remains are settlements such as crofts, but also
has changed and a lot of new remains have been found. For the moment there is a project called 'Forest and History' funded by the local department of forestry working in the area. The aim of the project is to find all kinds of deserted remains in the forest area and to inform the forest industry and thus preventing a destruction of ancient monuments. This has resulted in an increased awareness of these remains in the local community and it proves the importance of information and contacts during fieldwork. Archaeologists in the field work as a link between archaeology and the public.

The Gunnarskog parish is considered as an area where permanent settlement started in the Middle Ages. This has been the traditional view in Swedish archaeology, that when there are no visible prehistoric remains such as graves, the settlement in the area is considered to have been established during the Middle Ages (Hyenstrand 1994, 8-9). This view has been challenged by research in the last decade. In Gunnarskog there are a number of prehistoric remains i.e. settlement from the Stone Age, pitfalls for elk and charcoal pits connected with bloomery furnace iron production. Our research which will be presented below shows that the notion of a large scale colonisation during the medieval period in the central Swedish forested areas is too simplistic. In fact settlement can be traced back to prehistory.

The excavations at Skramle

A problem concerning studies of medieval rural settlement in Sweden is the difficulty of locating settlement sites. The large-scale strategy applied on a national level at the registration of archaeological sites where farmsteads located on 17th century maps are believed to be situated on the same place as medieval settlements has not been successful when applied in regional and local conditions, i.e. confronted with reality. It has also been an apparent problem to locate medieval cultural layers and constructions during excavations of sites where medieval rural settlements were supposed to be located. A list of archaeological operations on such sites carried out during the years 1955-1992 shows that out of more than 400 sites touched by excavation only about half gave indications of medieval activities. Also worth noting is that when medieval remains occurred they were often fragmentary and difficult to date and understand (Ersgård & Hållans 1996, 47-111). In short there is a general lack of knowledge of how medieval rural remains are located and recognised in the landscape, and it is our opinion that such a knowledge has to be built up from a local and regional level and be
integrated in landscape analyses. During the years of excavation at the deserted farmstead of Skramle we have encountered, and are still battling with the problem of how to recognise and understand the remains. And we have had to learn the hard way that nothing is what it appears to be at first sight.

The deserted settlement of Skramle was located in a somewhat irregular way. There was a tradition, written down in the 18th century, of the medieval farmsteads Skramle and Åmot that were abandoned due to the Black Death in the middle of the 14th century and never resettled (Fernow 1977, 82). However the name of Skramle was still used for a peninsula in the lake Gunnern and during the registration of archaeological sites of the parish of Gunnarskog, carried out in 1989 by the authors, efforts were made to locate the settlement site. But as nobody knew what to look for nothing was found. We returned to the peninsula of Skramle in 1990. Studies of old maps (17th-19th centuries) had added more probability to the theories that, somewhere on the peninsula, there really had been a settlement, abandoned before the oldest map (1641, LMV R3-97) came into existence. But even if the maps showed that there were was an area named Skramle that was in use but not settled, the maps did not indicate where a former settlement could have been located.

As we had encountered a great interest for archaeology in the parish of Gunnarskog, we were accompanied by a group of local inhabitants on our return to Skramle in 1990. This was the beginning of a very fruitful co-operation that was later going to be ‘institutionalised’ into an association by the name ‘Project Skramle’. And with a great deal of luck we found the site. We took up two small interventions at random, and in the second intervention we hit a hearth that
ancient fields that have not been dated, but appear to have been used also after the abandonment of the site according to stratigraphy and finds. Probably at least some of the fields still in use did also belong to the medieval farmstead.

The oldest house (H IX) from the 6th century A.D. appears to have been a kind of long-house (the size is not known as too small a part has been touched by excavation) with roof-supporting posts. As there is hardly any daub connected with this house the walls seem to have been of wood. A shallow hearth dug down in the ground in this house is among the constructions that have been located.

The other houses appear to have been wooden constructions (most probably log-timbered). Most of the houses (H II-VI and H XI) are placed on a light southern slope with big stones and sometimes on terraces created to level out the slope. We do not know if there were several houses belonging to the 6th-century phase, but we know that for each of the two later phases there seem to be several houses with specialised functions. According to the general assumption, there was a change in settlement pattern around 1000 A.D., when the multifunctional long-houses were successively replaced by several smaller houses with specialised functions. This change took place over an extended period and was different in nature in different regions (Augustsson 1992, 64).

Judging from the existence of hearths in four out of five houses belonging to the 13th-14th-centuries phase (H XI is omitted in this discussion as the evidence is still too limited), it is probable that Skramle at that time was a farmstead with several different households. The presence of cooking vessels and other items connected with daily domestic activities indicates that all four houses were dwelling houses, but we do not know whether they were contemporary. It is impossible to establish a relative chronology of the houses based on stratigraphical sequences, but it is likely that at least the houses H VII and H X were in existence at the same time as we have found remains of melted and slagged brass in house H VII and a buckle made out of the same brass in house H X (Nyström, communication).

The hearths in these four houses are of two kinds: the hearths in houses H VI and H VIII consisted of pits filled with fire-cracked stones and charcoal and in H VII and H X there were smoke-ovens with large bricks inside.

The only house lacking a hearth (H V) is a large house that seems to be divided into three sections. We have interpreted this house as a combined barn, store, stall, etc. If the 13th-14th-centuries phase was crowded with dwelling houses and equipped with only a single outhouse, the situation was reversed in
Fig. 4. - Plan over the excavation-site of Skramle.

the 15th-century phase. So far only the house H III has been interpreted as a dwelling house (but it has not been excavated to any larger extent), whereas house H I, with a large hearth in a small house, probably was a cooking house and the small houses H II and H IV most likely served as storehouses. During
the excavations in 1993 we made an astonishing discovery; one of the stones in the fundament to the large house – H V (M) belonging to the 13th-14th-century phase – turned out to be a rune stone with the older runic alphabet (futhark) dating from the 6th-8th centuries A.D. This was remarkable in two ways: first, only some twenty runestones with the older futhark are known in Sweden and, second, Skramle is situated in an area that should not, according to the present research status, have been colonised until the 12th century at the earliest (we had not yet located the 6th-century house)! The interpretation of the runic inscription is still being debated and will therefore be disregarded here.

For the moment 476 finds have been registered; 458 of them belong to the 13th-14th-century phase, 2 to the 15th-century phase and 16 are more recent. The finds material is dominated by simple objects of iron and stone, but there are also a few ‘luxury’ objects of bronze and brass such as a goblet, a buckle, a heraldic mount and a ring brooch. We have tried to sort the objects into different groups related to different functions and activities. The different groups are: domestic utensils (D), building details (B), objects related to husbandry and other animals (HA), handicraft (H), hunting and fishing (HF), agriculture (A), personal adornment (P) and others (O), comprising of pieces of flints and quarts, fragments and unidentified objects.

Group D includes vessels, strike-a-light flints and grindstones. It is worth noting that no pottery has been found at Skramle, and apart from pieces of a probable goblet made of bronze all vessels were made of soapstone. Building details are mostly nails, but also hooks, hinges, plates and locks. The most frequent item in the HA-group is the horseshoe nail, but there are also some horseshoes, parts of snaffles and buckles. Almost all objects in this group relate to horses and very few objects indicate the presence of other animals. A unexpectedly large group is the handicraft group. One reason for this is that whetstones have been included here, but also because there has been some handicraft production at the site. There are both tools and refuse connected with the manufacturing of soapstone objects (probably mainly spindle whorls and vessels). Other important artefacts are spindle whorls, smoothing stones, scrapers, awls and the above-mentioned melted and slagged brass. On the other hand, the HF- and A-groups are very small; there are hardly any objects that can be connected to fishing, only a few arrows (mostly for crossbows) and a small number of sickles. Ironically, basic subsistence is badly represented among the artefacts. Until the excavation season of 1996, objects for personal adornment were both very few and of a very basic nature, such as simple iron buckles and knives. But in 1996 a heraldic mount (not attributed to any family of nobility), a ring-brooch and an ornate buckle in brass were found in house H X.

Local and regional trade: contacts and influences

There are few studies on handicraft, production and trade in the medieval countryside in Sweden. Modern research, mainly within the field of history and economic history, has concentrated on the 16th century and the following era. Several researchers, influenced by Braudel and his concept of la longue durée, argue that the economic conditions resemble the previous period i.e. the late medieval period (Magnusson 1996, 35-61, 98-105). Some scholars believe that research has underestimated the importance of the market economy in the medieval agrarian context (Winberg 1985, 156-158). Others claim that the so called natural economy, i.e. production intended mainly for the household, was the basis for the agrarian society (Österberg 1977). Studies on handicraft in rural areas have been carried out in various regions of Europe, for instance in Germany by Helga Schultz and in England by Rodney Hilton (Gadd 1991, 53-56). A recent study on Swedish handicraft in the countryside shows that the crafts are underestimated in Swedish official records. These mentioned only those craftsmen who paid tax as craftsmen. During the Middle Ages, written law permitted craftsmen with land or with a domicile to avoid the relatively high taxes imposed on craftsmen by being taxed under some other title, i.e. as a farmer (Gadd 1991, 201-210). This study indicates that there was a production of handicraft in the countryside that never can be seen in the written sources. With this information, it is interesting to look into the archaeological material and see whether this picture can be verified or not. The investigations at Skramle indicate that handicraft for sale could have been very common in the Swedish medieval countryside, at least in the forested areas. As with rural studies as a whole, however, the problem is that we lack similar archaeological studies in Sweden that can complement the picture.

Artefacts linked to handicraft can be observed in the archaeological material at Skramle. There are number of indications for ‘over-production’ of commodities. These products do not belong in the agrarian sector, such as cereals and livestock. Instead we find traces of an extensive soapstone production. Products such as spindle whorls and vessels have been made on the farm. Buildings, especially built for production within various types handicraft, were probably used. The occurrence of soapstone artefacts
in archaeological excavations is usually related to contacts with Norway, since quarries for soapstone and production of soapstone items are well documented there. At Skramle we see that the use of soapstone quarries in the area probably was very important. The market for soapstone products was probably on a local scale. We can see that the material standard on the farm was very high during the period of soapstone production and during this period a lot of ‘outside’ influences can be detected, partly in building techniques and partly in the finds material.

At Skramle we relate the soapstone products to a local market, but there are other traces of more far-reaching contacts. We have some indications for the currying of hides. For instance, smoothing stones and scrapers have been found. Hides were a product that was interesting for a larger market, extending beyond the local one. Either traders came to the region or the inhabitants of Skramle travelled themselves to a market-place to sell their products. We do not know for what kind of markets Skramle was producing its goods. The more important market-places, Tingvalla (Karlstad) and Knusesund (Säffle), were the ones nearest and they were used for some purposes, but Gunnarskog parish is also located near the Norwegian border and the foreign trade was probably very important at this time. Even if a Swedish town or market place was the closest, the farmer could sell his products on the other side of the border. This is particularly true in the case of a choice stands between an inland town and a port. To the farmer the prices were more important than the distance (Linge 1969, 30-43). The crown tried to stop this border-trade during the late medieval period. Especially the trade in cattle was considered to be a threat to the Swedish economy. Amongst other things, the king aimed at strengthening the ties between town and countryside by making trade outside towns illegal. Obviously, this law was hard to enforce by the central government, as shown by the numerous exhortations and Royal Ordinances throughout the medieval period. In King Magnus Eriksson’s town-law from the late 13th century it is stated that trade shall be conducted in the towns, both between townsmen and farmers and not in the countryside or in other places (Holm-bäck & Wessén 1966, Köpmålabalken 23:1). In a province such as Värmland, without towns and without a strong control from the state, the farmers probably had a larger possibility to evade the legislation and getting their products to an appropriate market and ensuring a high price. This relative wealth is visible in the diversity of the artefacts and their exclusive character during 13th and 14th centuries in Skramle.

That some influences have reached Skramle can be interpreted in the artefacts discovered in connection with the investigations. But also the way the houses were constructed reveals external influences. In two houses we have found a kind of ‘smoke-oven’. This type of oven seems to be common in an urban setting. Whether it is common in the countryside is open to discussion. The question is problematic because of the lack of investigations. Studies on this topic have been carried out by Richard Blanton for different communities. He could observe that houses in the countryside often have been strongly influence by urban houses, especially in remote areas with farmers involved with long-distance trade (Blanton 1994). Is this the kind of influences we see in the 13th-14th-century houses in Skramle? Smoke-ovens are known in urban context both in Sweden and Norway at this time. One could argue that this indic-

Fig. 5. - Relative importance of the different groups of finds: 13th-14th-century phase.
mates a contact between an urban centre and the Skramle farmstead. The reservation is that we do not know how common smoke-ovens were in the countryside and in this area at this time.

Another contact we can notice in the Skramle material is the melted and slagged brass. The brass production commences on a large scale in Sweden during the 16th century. Smaller production units have been located in the medieval towns, for instance in Lögöse during the 14th century. It is not certain that the brass items were manufactured at Skramle. Maybe older brass objects have been melted down for casting new products. Thus, for instance, we have found a brooch made of brass which has possibly been produced at Skramle. Some other objects that can be characterised as ‘luxury’ objects have probably been bought on a market, since they are hardly of a local origin; these objects include a heraldic mount made of silver and a ring brooch made of silver and bronze. The contacts and influences at Skramle are one of the most important parts of our continued discussion in the project. We have shown that the preconception that a farm in a relatively remote area had little contact with the outside community can be questioned. The archaeological material is the only way to rectify this view and to find out what kind of economical situation and status a medieval farm located in a forest area really had, particularly when there are no written sources at all.

Resource-utilisation and non-utilisation

Skramle is situated in an area with waste forest outlands, and the forest and over time its resources have always been used in various ways. The possibility to use the outland has played an important role in making living in the parish of Gunnarskog possible, but the use of outlands could also be the basis for the production of goods for sale at a market and thus for the generation of wealth. It is important to point out that it was not the accumulation of wealth in itself that was interesting, but rather wealth as a mean for social reproduction consistent with a desired station. It was important to be a part of the society in general and its cultural values and practices also when living off the agricultural areas (Martens 1992, 5). What status did the farmers of Skramle wish to communicate? Probably the station of a well-situated farmer-landowner, i.e. the dominating group within the local society and an important economic and political group in Viking age and medieval Sweden. It is also from this group that part of the nobility emerged (in Sweden the estate of nobility was institutionalised in 1280). With the rising power of the state, king and church and the growing influences of European culture, the landed farmers had to chose sides. Some followed the king and could thus become part of the nobility. Others conserved old practises and values and considered the status of landed farmer and power within the local society to be the most important. The latter strategy appears to have been the most common one in the forest areas of central and northern Sweden (see Pettersson & Svensson 1996). Maybe the heraldic mount and the other luxury items from the late 13th century found at Skramle can be regarded as reflecting a landed farmer’s wish to compete with the young nobility. Equally of interest is the fact that during the critical period of the late 13th century the farmers of Skramle appear to have been cultivating the unusual and extravagant crops of wheat and oats (Ranhen, unpublished report) in a time when barley is believed to be the dominating crop in the region and wheat almost non-existent (Österberg 1977, 217-219).

Resource-utilisation has to be studied from several points of views. Here the testimony from the surrounding landscape of the parish of Gunnarskog (see Fig. 2) and from the farmstead of Skramle will be confronted. There are four major categories of outland use that are traceable in the landscape as sites (outland use known to have been practised only in historical times are disregarded): pitfalls for elks, bloomery furnace iron-production with charcoal pits, soapstone quarries and shielings. Judging from the spatial organisation of these sites only a shieling can be connected with Skramle with some degree of possibility, all the other sites are located in areas belonging to other farmsteads in historical times. But the rights to the outland was a complicated matter: parts of the outland as well as single resources and constructions could be sold, donated, leased, etc. (Hvarfner 1960, 55-56, Bäckvall 1920, 4-5).

The organisation of the use of outland is another factor that complicates the picture. The fact that some of the systems of pitfalls stretch out between two farmsteads indicates that there was some kind of co-ownership and co-operation between these farmsteads. On the other hand it is striking that only one farmstead is connected with iron-production and that several farmsteads appear not have participated in outland use (if outland use is restricted to the four known categories). In an as yet unpublished article one of the authors has put forward a suggestion that the farmers in Gunnarskog practised a kind of specialisation in outland use and there was an exchange of goods on a local basis (Svensson, in print). This would implicate that the local area was of great importance (see above) and played an important role when forming subsistence bases and patterns for the individual
farmsteads. Can such a theory be confirmed in the material from Skramle?

The low number of artefacts connected with hunting and fishing at Skramle is striking. But even if the farmers of Skramle practised hunting and fishing it is not necessary that the objects related to this activities should be found at the farm; fishing implements could have been kept in buildings by the lake and hunting equipment could also have been kept outside the farmstead itself. On the other hand, the use of pitfalls did not demand extensive hunting equipment. When not being able to rely on the archaeological evidence to illuminate the question of how important fish and wild game were to the daily diet at Skramle, it would be natural to turn to the osteological evidence. Unfortunately the osteological material found at Skramle is very sparse, only small fragments of burned bones seem to survive in the soil and most fragments are impossible to identify. The animals identified are sheep/goat, pig and cattle (Sjögren, unpublished report). The evidence of the sparse osteological material should thereby point in the direction of wild game not being part of the diet. But it is important to point out that it is possible that slaughtering and butchering could have taken place outside the farm in connection with the hunt (a system often practised today), and that meat from elks and other game could have reached Skramle as pure meat both if the game was hunted by the farmer themselves and if it was bought from others.

Hunting was also practised for other reasons than direct subsistence, e.g. for furs. Furs appear as an important economic resource in forest areas in Sweden, especially northern Sweden, and were exported to the European markets (Zachrisson 1996, 4). Crossbows were used in the hunt of squirrels and other small fur-bearing animals. From the existence of such arrows and smoothing stones at Skramle it seems likely that hunting for fur was part of the activities at Skramle, but it is difficult to judge its extension and importance.

Moving from hunting to iron-production and smithing, we can start by stating that 229 objects of iron have been found at Skramle. Most of the objects appear to be of good quality and are well made. So far neither bloomery furnaces for iron-production nor a forge for further processing of iron into objects have been located at Skramle. Small amounts of slag (a little bit more than 2 kilos), probably after smithing, have been found at Skramle. Pieces of slag are found over most of the excavation area, but the small ‘concentrations’ that are found are located near the hearths of the dwelling houses. Maybe this is the result of minor mending of iron objects at home. Indications for such a practise are given by a knife that, when conserved, showed clear signs of having been the object of mending by an unskilled person (information from conservator Martin Andrén, Kulturen, Lund). The absence of iron production and the practise of home-mending indicates that iron objects were bought and not made at Skramle, maybe they were bought from the local iron-producers in the parish of Gummerskog.

A handicraft well visible at Skramle is the manufacturing of soapstone objects. As has been stated above the production appears to have been directed towards a local market, as both the soapstone and the craftsmanship are of relatively low quality and the production seems to be directed towards a low number of different products. The low quality of the

![Fig. 6. - Relative importance of objects related to outland production at Skramle (13th-14th-century phase)]
farmsteads. Can such a theory be confirmed in the material from Skramle?

The low number of artefacts connected with hunting and fishing at Skramle is striking. But even if the farmers of Skramle practised hunting and fishing it is not necessary that the objects related to this activities should be found at the farm; fishing implements could have been kept in buildings by the lake and hunting equipment could also have been kept outside the farmstead itself. On the other hand, the use of pitfalls did not demand extensive hunting equipment. When not being able to rely on the archaeological evidence to illuminate the question of how important fish and wild game were to the daily diet at Skramle, it would be natural to turn to the osteological evidence. Unfortunately the osteological material found at Skramle is very sparse, only small fragments of burned bones seem to survive in the soil and most fragments are impossible to identify. The animals identified are sheep/goat, pig and cattle (Sjögren, unpublished report). The evidence of the sparse osteological material should thereby point in the direction of wild game not being part of the diet. But it is important to point out that it is possible that slaughtering and butchering could have taken place outside the farm in connection with the hunt (a system often practised today), and that meat from elks and other game could have reached Skramle as pure meat both if the game was hunted by the farmer themselves and if it was bought from others.

Hunting was also practised for other reasons than direct subsistence, e.g. for furs. Furs appear as an important economic resource in forest areas in Sweden, especially northern Sweden, and were exported to the European markets (Zachrisson 1996, 4). Crossbows were used in the hunt of squirrels and other small fur-bearing animals. From the existence of such arrows and smoothing stones at Skramle it seems likely that hunting for fur was part of the activities at Skramle, but it is difficult to judge its extension and importance.

Moving from hunting to iron-production and smithing, we can start by stating that 229 objects of iron have been found at Skramle. Most of the objects appear to be of good quality and are well made. So far neither bloomery furnaces for iron-production nor a forge for further processing of iron into objects have been located at Skramle. Small amounts of slag (a little bit more than 2 kilos), probably after smithing, have been found at Skramle. Pieces of slag are found over most of the excavation area, but the small ‘concentrations’ that are found are located near the hearths of the dwelling houses. Maybe this is the result of minor mending of iron objects at home. Indications for such a practise are given by a knife that, when conserved, showed clear signs of having been the object of mending by an unskilled person (information from conservator Martin Andréén, Kulturen, Lund). The absence of iron production and the practise of home-mending indicates that iron objects were bought and not made at Skramle, maybe they were bought from the local iron-producers in the parish of Gunnarskog.

A handicraft well visible at Skramle is the manufacturing of soapstone objects. As has been stated above the production appears to have been directed towards a local market, as both the soapstone and the craftsmanship are of relatively low quality and the production seems to be directed towards a low number of different products. The low quality of the

Fig. 6. - Relative importance of objects related to outland production at Skramle (13th-14th-century phase)
soapstone indicates that it was quarried in the vicinity, and there are two soapstone quarries located in the north and the south respectively of the parish of Gunnarskog. An analysis of the origin of the soapstone at Skramle has given evidence that the southern quarry was the one used most, but there are also indications that a minor quantity of the soapstone originates from the northern quarry (Nilsson 1995, 30). Whether the farmers of Skramle possessed parts of these quarries or bought the soapstone is not known.

We will sum up these three categories of outland use and their importance at Skramle first. Among the different groups of finds into which the finds material of Skramle has been sorted and which have been presented above, there are no groups related to outland use - apart from the small group of hunting and fishing. If we instead make a group of objects related to hunting, fur working and soapstone production, the relative importance of outland production among the total finds material becomes more evident.

As the fourth category of outland use, the shielings are part of the agrarian economy and thus part of the farmstead. In the county of Värmland shielings were used for grazing during summertime, for hay making and sometimes also for agriculture (Eles 1975, 236-241). The relative importance of the shielings depended on how well these needs could be satisfied by the farmstead itself, and it is therefore not surprising that most of the shielings are found in the northern part of the parish of Gunnarskog where the agricultural lands of the farmsteads were of a lesser quality. There was however a shieling situated relatively close to Skramle, and as this was abandoned early it is impossible to attribute to a specific farmstead. The other farmsteads in the vicinity of this shieling however had their shielings in other locations, so it is possible that this particular shieling belonged to Skramle. The use of shielings was not without its problems as the long absence of the cattle caused a lack of manure for the fields by the farmstead. In northern Värmland, where shielings were common, the farmers had elaborate systems and dedicated a lot of work to compensate for the lack of manure (Mörner 1952, 70). As the products of a shieling are the same as can be found at a farmstead, we have chosen to discuss the possible use of shielings by the farmers of Skramle from the point of view of manuring.

When presenting the finds material found at Skramle the total domination of finds belonging to the 13th-14th-century phase is apparent. The cultural layers from this period are also of a different character than the cultural layers from the 15th-century phase. The earlier cultural layers are thick (sometimes almost 0.5 m thick) and greasy, but the 15th-century ones are thin (hardly 0.1 m thick) and dry. There are several possible explanations to this; maybe there were fewer people living at Skramle during the 15th century (likely) or maybe this phase was a lot shorter than the preceding phase (not likely); maybe there even was a change in attitudes towards rubbish etc. The explanation of fewer people during the 15th century is however not enough to explain the thin cultural layers, as there were also more houses and larger areas in use during the 13th-14th-century phase. There appears to be a change in attitude towards rubbish for during the 13th-14th centuries there are concentrations of refuse close by the houses and these are lacking in the later period. Maybe there was a combination of a wish to alienate the refuse from the vicinity of the living quarters and a need for manure for the fields that resulted in the thin 15th-century cultural layers. It is hard to use this tentative discussion as a conclusive argument for the use of shielings in the 15th century, but it can be used as an hypothesis for further investigations.

We conclude this article by saying that it is important to look upon a farmstead in a larger context than the settlement itself. Medieval farmers in Sweden did not spend their entire life at home and they were part of different spheres of society. Here we have put the emphasis on the local and regional arenas, which we believe have been of great importance to our farmers at Skramle, but there were other arenas that are still left to study.

References


BÄCKVALL L. 1920: Blästugnen vid Blästkärring-bäcken på Södra Brandäns ågor i Dalby socken och dess ägare.


LMV – National Land Survey of Sweden, Gavle (Statens Lantmäteriverk, Gävle).


MÖRNER A. 1952: Kort oekonomisk beskrifning över Wermeland åhr 1762, in: Värmland förr och nu, Karlstad, 7-146.


Ortnamnen i Värmlands län 6, Jössé härad, Gunnarskog socken, 1942, 39-49.


SVENSSON E. 1996: Händiga skogsbönder produktion och varuutbyte. Article under translation to English to be print in: Off the beaten track, Lund.


Communication with Inger Nyström, Västsvenska Konservatorsatelen, Göteborg.

Sofia Andersson & Eva Svensson
Department of Medieval Archaeology
Archaeological Institute
University of Lund
Sweden