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The unknown Castle – archaeological Aspects of Lordship, Household and rural Environment

Abstract
Folk traditions suggest that the ruins at Saxholmen, in Ölme parish, Värmland, Sweden, are those of a prestigious castle, whereas the documentary sources do not record any structure as having existed at this location. Archaeological fieldwork was the only way to resolve this debate. The result of a five-year program of fieldwork, the castle of Saxholmen once again functions as a part of the Medieval landscape.

The unknown castle is brought to life through archaeological excavations

'September 28th: I went out to Saxholmen...This islet is situated in the middle of the sound between Kumbelön and Svartebärg, and it is a very high islet. Out there is an old castle, which tradition says was built by a man named Saxo. Another tradition says that he was a German of Saxony, and therefore it was called Saxe castle. When he was at Christmas mass at Ölme church his wife ran away from him and set the castle on fire. In making her escape she had turned the horse’s shoes backwards, and all the traces went back to the islet, while she with another man went...’

(Diarium Gylleniamum: AD 1639)

The ruins have influenced peoples' image of the past and legends have been created around them, as the writings of P.M. Gyllenius illustrate. Although unknown from medieval documents, Saxholmen Castle survived in folk traditions, which were only written down, as above, in the 17th century. This lack of early documentary sources has created questions about the very existence of the castle. A local historian, Arvid Ernvik, has speculated that the remains at Saxholmen are those of a storehouse used for drying fish (Ernvik 1983, 36). This idea stems from 16th-century written sources that refer to this area, specifically the shoreline opposite the island of Saxholmen, as having been crown land, with associated fishing rights (Ibid., 36).

In an attempt to clarify the situation and to ascertain the degree of truth in the folk tradition by investigating archaeologically the remains at Saxholmen, a research project was begun in 1992. The archaeological record at Saxholmen has revealed a unique, high-status castle dated to the 13th century, rather than a storehouse for drying fish.

Saxholmen castle is situated on a rocky island in Ölme bay, Ölme parish, in the south-east of Värmland (see Fig. 1). Today, Ölme parish is one of the most fertile parts of the county, supporting rich arable and pastoral farming. The hinterland of Saxholmen can be divided into discrete zones: the agriculturally rich lowland and the littoral, including the inshore waters of Vänern. Ölme parish is situated on the north shore of Sweden’s largest fresh water lake, Vänern, which has been an important communication link throughout history.

Fig. 1. - Saxholmen within the county of Värmland, Sweden.
Excavations at Saxholmen continued for five years (1992-1996) as a co-operation project between the County Museum of Värmland and the Kristinehamn Community Council, initiated in connection with the celebration of the council’s 350th jubilee. The County Museum of Värmland considered the remains of the Saxholmen castle and the project to be of great interest, particularly as an excavation was going on at that time at the Edsholmen castle, the second castle in the county which is also located on the northern shore of Vänern, to the west of Saxholmen. Most of the fieldwork was carried out by amateur archaeologists from the association Saxe Knutar under the direction and management of archaeologists employed by the County Museum of Värmland.

Research agenda

The initial questions of the research project were simple: when was the castle built and by whom? Why was it abandoned and when? What kind of remains, artefacts and cultural layers were to be found at Saxholmen? These questions were supplemented by a further set of questions, originating from the excavators’ desire to study the castle as a place of habitation. From the perspective of spatial organisation, what was the function of each structure or definable area, and how did these inter-relate? What was the social structure of the inhabitants of this castle? Understanding the processes of consumption and production formed another element of the research program.

The result of these more specific research questions was to focus the excavation efforts toward identifying the dwelling houses, and toward establishing the nature of each house. As fieldwork progressed, the research aims were broadened to include other areas of study, including military tactics and defence in a social context, the rural landscape and farms in the hinterland of the castle, and the physical construction of the castle.

A forum including medieval archaeologists, archaeologists, historians and an osteologist was formed at the beginning of the project in order to broaden the perspectives and areas of competence that could be brought to bear on the developing research project.

Background to the excavations of Saxholmen

The island on which the castle is situated consists of two small hill tops, oriented north/south, of which the southern one is the largest in height and area. It is around this high point that most of the castle remains are situated. The rich organic layers associated with human occupation have given rise to dense vegetation, which initially made it hard to identify the remains of the castle. Detailed mapping has been carried out over the duration of the research project. This on-going mapping process was necessary because of the density of the vegetation and its seasonal fluctuations, and because the excavators learned to better recognise the different structures as the project developed.

In all, there were nine major interventions in an attempt to answer the questions posed in the research agenda, that is, to establish the location and the function of the dwelling houses. Excavation was carried out mainly with trowels. All of the soil excavated below the active turf layer was sieved with meshes of 4 millimetres or smaller. During excavation, discrete layers and features were treated as separate contexts but were documented together when interpreted as part of larger constructions (such as floors, walls and hearths being the component parts of a house); this was done to make it easier to understand the chronological relationships on site. All finds in situ were recorded three-dimensionally.

The remains of Saxholmen Castle

On the highest point of the southern plateau of the island, the remains of a square tower were located; it measured 10 by 10 m and had 2 m thick walls. The walls were faced with dressed stone on the outside, with an inner core consisting of mortared rubble. The inner part of the tower was not investigated. The ruined remains of a perimeter wall, consisting of dispersed, undressed stones standing to a maximum height of 0.5 m possibly formed the foundation for a wooden palisade. It appears that the wall was built only where the natural defences are weak. An oval stone foundation that was associated with the perimeter wall has been excavated in Excavation Area 3. This was interpreted as being a foundation for a wooden tower. This tower is situated immediately within the perimeter wall and most likely functioned as a supporting link in the perimeter wall or palisade. A section was cut through the perimeter wall, in association with the excavation of the oval foundation. The stratigraphy indicated that the wall had been built after habitation had been established in this area.

There are two natural approaches to the castle, one in the north and one in the south. The two approaches consist of hollows which cross the perimeter wall on the way up to the castle. At this point the wall is
Fig. 2. - Saxholmen Castle: its local environs.
stronger and passage through the gateway is angled, and at the southern entrance there is a small stone foundation, which implies the presence of a gatehouse.

The stone foundations of a building have been excavated in Excavation Area 1. This structure has a rectangular shape and is well-constructed, similar to the tower. Here, dressed stones have been used and on the foundations of the eastern side there bricks were found, which suggests that the building may have had a brick portal. Brick is unusual in the 13th century in this part of the country and a possible interpretation of the function of this building is as a store-house, which often was the best built structure because of its importance. Beneath the stone foundation, there was evidence of a wooden construction that had been burnt down. The remains of this structure have been interpreted as a combined building and defensive construction.

North of the tower, in Excavation Area 2, a small house was excavated (6.5 m by 3-4 m) with a large hearth in its western part. The ground construction consisted of smaller stones on which a wooden sill was laid. To some extent, it could also be demonstrated that the outcropping bedrock had been incorporated into the building. To the east and west of the hearth, there was evidence for benches. To the east, only the stone foundations remained, but to the west remains of the wooden benches overlay the stone foundations.

South of the tower, in Excavation Area 5, was another house with a easily identifiable construction and a rich artefact assemblage. This house turned out to be the largest one, measuring 10 m by 7 m, with an east/west orientation. Remains of the foundations were found between patches of outcropping rock, which had been incorporated into the house. The hearth was 2 m by 2 m and differed in its construction from the other excavated hearths because it was a smoke-oven, with three walls and a roof. Beneath this house, was an earlier structure that had burnt down. The remains of planks, wattle and spruce needles indicated a slight construction with walls of wooden frames and wattle.

A third dwelling house, Excavation Area 6, was located in 1994 and dug out in 1995-1996. The hearth was built of clay and stones, the same as that found in Excavation Area 2. This house though seemed to be different from the other two houses; it gave an impression of being both better located and more solidly built, probably to withstand extreme weather conditions. Another structure that was excavated in Excavation Area 8 has been interpreted as a workshop because of the lack of a hearth and the nature of its artefact assemblage. The main kinds of handicrafts that have been detected in this house are horn-working and bronze-working. Excavation Area 4 was opened in the belief that a house might be located here, but there was no clear archaeological indication of the existence of a house or any other structure; but it could be an area for refuse disposal.

Outside the main castle area, as defined by the perimeter wall, other remains have been excavated. These include a lime kiln located on a ledge to the north of the perimeter wall; other structures associated with the lime kiln, (Excavation area 7) have been located but not excavated. The latter include a pit with a dam and a channel used to extinguish the lime. A structure west of the perimeter has been interpreted as a smithy, Excavation Area 9. The location of the structure and a sparse amount of slag together with iron fragments and fire-cracked stone yielded the excavation, made it possible to interpret the remains as those of a smithy.

Two harbour-structures have been located. One on the southern point of the island has been interpreted as a boathouse and a jetty. Outside the jetty, divers have found remains of stone-filled boxes, which may have been functioned as a breakwater. The other jetty is located at the south-west of the island. The best harbour area is, however, a small bay north-west of the castle area. This was unfortunately totally overgrown by reeds and no mapping or examination could be undertaken.

How to make the artefacts speak

Castle studies have so far focused on building techniques, fortifications or warfare and power. In contrast to these traditional studies, the main aim of the project at Saxholmen has been to study the castle as a place for daily life and its activities. The artefacts found at Saxholmen reflect the daily life and activities at the castle, and by using different ways of interpreting the finds, we aim to get closer to the medieval people of Saxholmen.

According to the artefacts and structural remains at Saxholmen, the castle could clearly be dated to the 13th century, with a few mysterious and exciting exceptions. The most common way of using artefacts is to date remains and/or a cultural layer. By knowing the date of the objects, conclusions can be drawn about the active periods of the site. Sometimes archaeologists come across objects that do not fit in to the general picture. This could be a result of the deviating function, dating or circumstances of the finds.

According to chronology at least three aberrant finds have been discovered at Saxholmen: one gem-
stone from the Roman Period (0-400 AD); one oval tinder-stone probably from the period of 400-600 AD; and one yellow, segmented glass-bead (in a colour and form usually attributed to the 10th century AD). These odd finds can be explained in different ways. One possibility is examined by Jensen for Roman gem-stones (0-400 AD) at Ribe. He explains the presence of these artefacts in 9th-century waste layers as a result of the stripping of Roman finger rings. The golden finger rings are assumed to be the result of plundering expeditions and the sale to goldsmiths at Ribe for re-use (Jensen 1991, 19).

Besides these oddly dated finds, the archaeologists sometimes come across unusual depositional circumstances of artefacts. For example, all four moulds with runic inscriptions were found on the floor surfaces in two different houses (Excavation Areas 2 & 5), one battle axe found at the bottom of the fireplace and one gold ring at top of the same fireplace (Excavation Area 5). A horseshoe was found in the foundations of a house wall, and the oval tinder-stone was found in the east wall of the same house (Excavation Area 5).

In these cases, the chosen interpretation is that these unusual finds are magical symbols, especially when it is known that the second phase in Excavation Area 5 had been burnt down. To protect the new house from the same fate, they tried to bless it with different kinds of objects. The shape of the oval tinder-stone is similar to that of a stone axe, and stone axes are often named thunderbolts and sometimes used to offer protection against lightning strikes and fire. In many countries, it is common to place a steel object in the wall or under the threshold to protect new houses.

These two cases of unusual finds, dating and find circumstances, are used as examples that archaeologists also need to explain the oddities. This is one possible interpretation.

**Activities**

The primary aim of the research project at Saxholmen was to study the daily life within the castle. To make this possible the artefacts were divided into activity-based or functional units. At the Saxholmen excavation, the finds were divided into ten functional categories, with an extra category for unidentified objects. The total number of artefacts used in the table and charts below amounts to 2185 objects.

1. Building materials
2. Craftsmanship
3. Trade
4. Domestic utensils
5. Fishing and hunting
6. Agriculture utensils
7. Personal adornment
8. Armour and weapons
9. Leisure gear and gaming
10. Animal utensils
    Unidentified objects

Each of these groups is intended to reflect the daily life within the medieval castle. One of the basic problems that archaeologists deal with when it comes to artefacts is the terminology; how are the objects classified? The lack of terminology is demonstrated by the example that a hammer is not just a hammer,
Table 1
The finds material divided into functional categories and by excavation area.

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it could be a claw hammer or a joiner’s hammer (Pettersson 1996, 163-170). For further reading about contents of the categories and terminology as a whole, it may be useful to mention that this discussion has already been published in *Castella Maris Baltic II* by Susanne Pettersson.

The first chart indicates that most finds come from Excavation Area 5 and that the largest category is building materials (which does not include wall or roofing material, such as wattle and daub). The charts for the different excavation areas tell something about the function of the houses and the main types of activities.

Building materials, mostly nails and rivets, occur in all excavation areas except area 7, which did not include any objects except daub, limestone and animal bones. The category of animal utensils, mostly horse nails, are present in all the excavation areas except area 9. Excavation area 7 is interpreted as a lime kiln, and excavation area 8 as a craftsman’s house for bronze and horn works, and excavation area 9 as an iron smithy. Craftsmanship had been an activity in all the areas, but according to the total assemblage it is better represented in Excavation Area 8 (34 artefacts out of a total 165). There are artefacts, tools and waste material in all excavation areas, probably as a result of cottage industry being practised. The category of trade is represented by one trade seal from Excavation Area 5 and the category of agriculture utensils by one sickle from Excavation Area 6. The largest amount of domestic utensils comes from the largest house (Excavation Area 5) and that house also has the largest assemblage as compared to the other excavation areas. Excavation Areas 2 & 5 include many personal adornments of very high class. For example, two sheet metal strips of lead bearing runic inscriptions (Fig. 3), one mount with heraldic motif (Fig. 3), and finger rings, two of them gold. Excavation Area 2 yielded one clothing bell (Fig. 3).

**Gender in the artefacts**

When studying activities, another possibility could be the distinction between male and female inhabitants of the castle, old and young people, and the level of social ranking. A common way to infer the presence of male inhabitants is to look for 'weapons', and the female inhabitants could be represented by the occurrence of jewellery and textile handicraft. In the present example, the weapons are already included in the charts given above, but to find the women's goods and utensils we have to examine the categories of 'personal adornments' and 'craftsmanship'.

The only completed study of the categories provided earlier are the objects from the category of 'personal adornment'. Many of the objects in this category cannot be referred to as specifically male or female because they are functional items that exist in both male and female clothing. Conclusions will therefore be reached by examining the artefacts for details such as the different sizes of finger rings, and the number of beads from the category of 'personal adornments', the existence of weapons, and handicraft objects like spindle whorls, loom weights, a pair of scissors and one part of a thimble, give a clear indication of the presence of both males and females at Saxholmen (Fig. 4).

The artefacts clearly indicate both females and males at the castle, and it is possible to surmise that whole families could have been present. It is a well-known problem to identify the presence of other agegroups than adults through the artefacts. How can we
Chart 2. - The finds divided into functional categories by the excavation areas.
be sure whether the function of an object is that of a toy for a child? At Saxholmen, there is one artefact, a clay marble, that could be a children’s toy but it could also be part of something else. Other finds connected to games, such as two dice and gaming pieces, may have been used by all ages.

Some of the objects from the category of ‘personal adornments’ provide information on the people who may have lived in the castle. At Saxholmen, there are two mounts with heraldic motifs. One of them is known to belong to a certain family, the Bobergs. The origin of the other mounts is unknown for the moment. The two heraldic mounts, one clothing bell, two golden finger rings and gold-plated bronze finds may be interpreted as indicating the inhabitant’s high social ranking. As shown above it is difficult to prove age differences from the artefact record, and the same is true for demonstrating the existence of people of a lower social rank.

Who built the castle, and why?

There are two questions which are impossible to avoid: who built the castle and why? Saxholmen Castle has not been identified in the written sources, at least not under the name that we today can connect to the established fortification on the island of Saxen in Ölme bay, known as Saxholmen Castle. It is possible that the castle was known under another name by its contemporaries. One such possibility is the castle Stickaborg, mentioned in written sources. The castle was offered to King Valdemar in 1276, along with the county of Värmland, amongst other things (Pettersson & Svensson 1995, 118). But at the same time it is likely that the castle was simply called Saxholmen, its name in the written sources from the 17th century onwards (Loven 1996, 409-410).

The fact that the castle cannot be studied with help from documentary sources also makes the discussion about who built Saxholmen and its historical role hypothetical. Irrespective of what views the researchers choose to represent, there is little or no hard evidence that can be used in this debate. Our aim here is to present three theoretical models on how Saxholmen Castle can be interpreted. For each of the three models, a number of possible candidates may have built the castle will be suggested.

There may have been several reasons to build Saxholmen Castle. It cannot be excluded that during its relatively short existence – and in fact also during the building phase – its role has changed. With its unstable political situation, the 13th century could quickly have changed the conditions for a castle like Saxholmen. One important event at this time that could have changed the political situation in the area was around year 1280 when the king, Magnus Ladulås, was struggling with an on-going rebellion against royal power while at the same time aspiring to centralisation. In response to this rebellion he executed John and Birger Filipsson and took their castle, Ymseborg (Loven 1996, 279)
The first model of interpretation is that Saxholm-
men could be a fortified manor house, belonging to a
local aristocrat. Or to be more precise, Saxholmén is
the fortified and relocated habitation part of a man-
house. The castle in itself, and the area around it on
the island, should not be seen as a farm, because the
island is too small. Rather, the farm element of the
manor house would be located on the mainland.
There are several points in favour of this explanation.
One is that royal castles had a strategic location in the
landscape, which cannot be said to be the case of
Saxholmén (Loven 1996, 409-410). It is unlikely that
the castle had a purely tactical function as a fort pro-
tecting Ölme Bay, because the technical knowledge
of the time was insufficient to effectively block such
an opening. Another argument is that it is hard to find
a reason as to why anyone may have wanted to block
Ölme bay, as it cannot be seen as a through-route of
strategic importance.

A further reason to connect the castle with the
aristocratic class rather than with the king, is the
structure of land ownership in the area. For the year
1540, land-records show that nowhere in the county
of Värmland is there such a concentration of nobility
as in Ölme parish (Nilsson 1995). At the same time it
is possible to establish that there is no concentration
of land belonging to the king in this area. Such an
argument relies on a similarity of the 16th-century
distribution of land ownership to that of a period
three hundred years earlier. But medieval documen-
tation (Sw. medeltida diplommaterial) suggests that
this is indeed the case (Nilsson 1995). The artefacts
from the excavation point to a group with the charac-
ter of nobility in a civil environment. There is no
indication that the castle functioned as a camp for a
military garrison, which might have been expected if
the structure had belonged to the crown. Another
condition worth considering in this discussion is that
Saxholmén is probably a difficult castle to attack
during the summer season, requiring a water-borne
force. Without further argumentation it can be assum-
ed that the location of the castle on the island is prob-
ably the most important of the tactical considera-
tions. However, the conditions of defence change
dramatically during the winter season when the water
freezes to ice, and the island becomes more easily
accessible. There is information claiming that it is possible to keep an area of water free of ice by pouring seal oil in open areas in the ice cover, but even if possible, it remains doubtful that such a tactic would be practical considering the length of the coastline at Saxholmen. If Saxholmen only had a military function, would it then be satisfactory to think that the castle only fulfilled this function during the summer?

If in the next step we turn to the written documents for a suitable candidate for the role as builder of the castle in concordance with this first model, a possible name would be Johan Wermiske. It seems that during the early 14th century this family owned widespread landed properties in the parish of Ölme. In a will dated to 1322, a member of this family named Mrs Ramborg calls the church of Rudsberg her own. This church will later be Ölme church. It is interesting that she is describing the church as her own and that it has the same name as the farm, Rudsberg. This indicates a clear link between the farm and the church, and the latter may have been a ‘patronage church’. These points are far from being well-established but the Wermiske family is to be considered a strong candidate for the role of constructors and possessors of Saxholmen castle, (Pettersson & Svensson 1995, 117-120; Nilsson 1995, 12-13).

A second way to look at Saxholmen is to claim that it is a control point in connection to a built up concentration of property. According to this model, Saxholmen is – as it was in the previous model – a castle for the nobility, but the difference is that here the castle should not be seen as a fortified farm, but as a fortified palace or dwelling. One possible idea could be that during the 13th century an arriving aristocrat may have needed to build a fortified structure, originally to consolidate a claim to land ownership.

The argument for this kind of interpretation is that the location of Saxholmen is peripheral. It is possible that a fortified farm belonging to a local aristocrat would have been located elsewhere. But such an argument is weak. The excavations demonstrated that the occupation period of the castle may have been short. It would have been a significant investment to construct a castle that had a relatively short period of use. This destruction of capital could be explained by a failure of the inheritance. Mats Mogren suggests that the same situation applies at Aspnäs in the county of Uppland, and that it could be explained in a similar way (Mats Mogren, University of Lund, pers. comm.).

A possible candidate within the framework of this interpretation model is the law-man Höld. In the year 1268, he bequeathed twelve farms, mainly in the south-eastern part of Väner in the county of Värm-
only a very small part of it. They are creatures unsuited to being kept in a restricted area for any amount of time. The evidence suggests that Saxholmen was self-sufficient when it comes to farmed meat, and could therefore have had the potential to function in a relatively hostile locality.

Which known historical figures could have been the owner of the castle according to this model? In an overview of the older families of the nobility, it is mentioned that the family of Boberg owned land in Värmland, and that a daughter of the knight and councillor Lars Boberg was married to Algot Jonsson, law-man of Värmland. Around 1296-97, Lars Boberg also signed a letter on Hammarö, a peninsula in the southern part of Värmland, (Loven 1996, 409; Nilsson 1995, 8 ff; Petersson & Svensson 1995, 117-120). In this context, it has to be noted that there is no known link between the Boberg family and the area of Ölme, in the same way that such a link exists, for example, with the Wermske family. However, the archaeological material comes to the rescue here – a heraldic mount with the Boberg arms has been found during excavations in the castle. The Boberg family was related to the royal family and, according to Halvar Nilsson, Lars Boberg seems to have been on royal business when he was in Värmland (Nilsson 1995, 58). Alternatively, if we consider a candidate from the people who opposed the Bjälbo family, the above-mentioned Filipssonerna could be of significance. They represent a political power that had the motive and the resources to build a castle like Saxholmen without permission from the crown, as exemplified by Ymse Castle. Ymse Castle is situated close to Ölme bay but there is nothing in the written sources that indicates that the Filipssonerna had any land in the neighbourhood.

The Image of the Castle in the Hinterland

How has the surrounding landscape been influenced economically, socially and mentally by Saxholmen Castle? What did the castle represent to people living in its hinterland? Security or threat? Restrictive control or intellectual and cultural expansion? According to the written records (Ernvik 1983, 35; Nilsson H. 1995), the rural environment of the castle consisted of single farms and the majority of people living in the area derived their main income from farming activities, a strong determining force influencing the pattern of their lives, whatever social stratum they belonged to. It is important to establish that the people living in the hinterland of Saxholmen have to be contextualised. Their class, gender and social and economic situations must be taken into consideration, as well as the ways these factors may have coloured their perception of the castle.

Judging from the archaeological evidence, the manifestation of the castle in the area is illustrated most clearly by the existence of one of the largest square towers in Sweden for this period (Mogren 1996). So this physical presence alone must have had an impact on the hinterland. But such a presence cannot be divorced from the above-mentioned discussion related to the question as to whom the castle belonged. That Saxholmen belonged to a member of the highest elite of society is shown, for example, by the dress accessories that have been found (see Figs. 3 & 4). Whether the castle was a manifestation of a local aristocrat or of someone from outside the area, remains uncertain judging from the presently available level of evidence. But castles are undoubtedly symbols of power and administrative control (Svensson 1994, 159). Most are also central to the feudal system, whereby the hinterland is farmed in order to support the castle (Saunders 1990, 184). This raises the question of whether the hinterland of Saxholmen can be classified as being under feudal rule.

During the Medieval Period, the ownership of land by the aristocracy was a means of creating social order, and the feudal way of life was set within this spatial framework. Power was directly dependent upon land ownership; ‘a hierarchy of land rights and consequently a hierarchy of space’ (Ibid.: 185). It must be stressed that feudalism, as a system recognisable from extant evidence, has never existed in Sweden: legally the peasants were free (Lindqvist & Ågren 1985, 32). The structure of ownership of land in Sweden recorded in the early 16th century shows that the amount of land jointly owned by the nobility and the church was 42 %, and within that group the nobility (Sw. världsliga frälset) had 20.7 %, while the ecclesiastical bodies (Sw. andliga frälset) held 21.3 %. The king owned 5.6 % (Sw. kronofjord) and 52.4 % was taxable land (Sw. skattejord). This created different conditions among the peasants; if for example you where a ‘landbo’, you did not own your own land, but instead worked the land for someone else, often of noble rank (Lindqvist & Ågren 1985, 31). The written sources indicate that many of the medieval farms in the hinterland of Saxholmen were in the possession of nobles (Nilsson H. 1995). So this must be the background for understanding the farmers’ ability to move within the landscape. Their social and political life was bound to the community, and – where applicable – to the imposition of the landowning class (Ohler 1996, 123).

What was the psychological impact of the castle, and how was it perceived by the local people? This
can only be understood by further studies within the framework of an interdisciplinary approach, including archaeological survey and excavation, cartographic evidence, documentary sources and onomastic evidence, made necessary by the fragmentary nature and varying quality of the source material from this area. The long-term aim is to collate all this data in such a way as to provide a meaningful insight into the medieval landscape around Saxholmen Castle.

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References

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