



## PhD Dissertation Projects

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## Outlanders? Resource Colonisation, Raw Material Exploitation and Networks in Middle Iron Age Sweden

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The Middle Iron Age, around 300–650 CE, was characterised by extensive transformations across many aspects of society in the area of present-day Sweden. These changes included a fundamental reorganisation of settlement structure, new burial rituals, increased militarisation and the building of hillforts. Moreover, in the time period, social stratification increased, there was a growing amount of imported objects, sometimes with exotic origins, and, especially in middle Sweden, the largescale construction of monuments.

The thesis *Outlanders? Resource Colonisation, Raw Material Exploitation and Networks in Middle Iron Age Sweden* addresses an additional aspect of Middle Iron Age societal change, namely a largely overlooked increase in the utilisation of raw materials and resources from landscapes situated beyond the agrarian farm, such as boreal forests, lakes, rivers and the coastal zone. These non-agrarian landscapes are commonly referred to as the outlands (*Utmark* in Swedish).

The thesis is based on the *hypothesis* that the exploitation of the outlands is a fundamental, but underrated, factor for explaining the development of the agrarian regions in the Middle Iron Age. The central idea is that the

changes in land utilisation and societal structure that can be seen in the agrarian farms during the period are associated with an intensified exploitation of the landscape and new ways of organising production and controlling land use. The *objective* of the dissertation is to expand our knowledge of Iron Age outland resource exploitation and the acquisition of raw materials and goods for further refinement into trade items with the *aim* to achieve a more profound understanding of the societal developments that took place in the agrarian regions, as well as in the outlands, during the Middle Iron Age. The argument of the thesis is constituted of four case studies published in peer-reviewed journals, in relation to studies performed by other scholars.

### ***The Articles and Discussion***

The articles “Towards a Refined Chronology of Prehistoric Pitfall Hunting in Sweden” (Hennius 2020a) and “Whalebone Gaming Pieces: Aspects of Marine Mammal Exploitation in Vendel and Viking Age Scandinavia” (Hennius et al. 2018) investigate chronological frameworks regarding the large-scale hunting of terrestrial and marine mammals, respectively. In the first paper, radiocarbon samples from

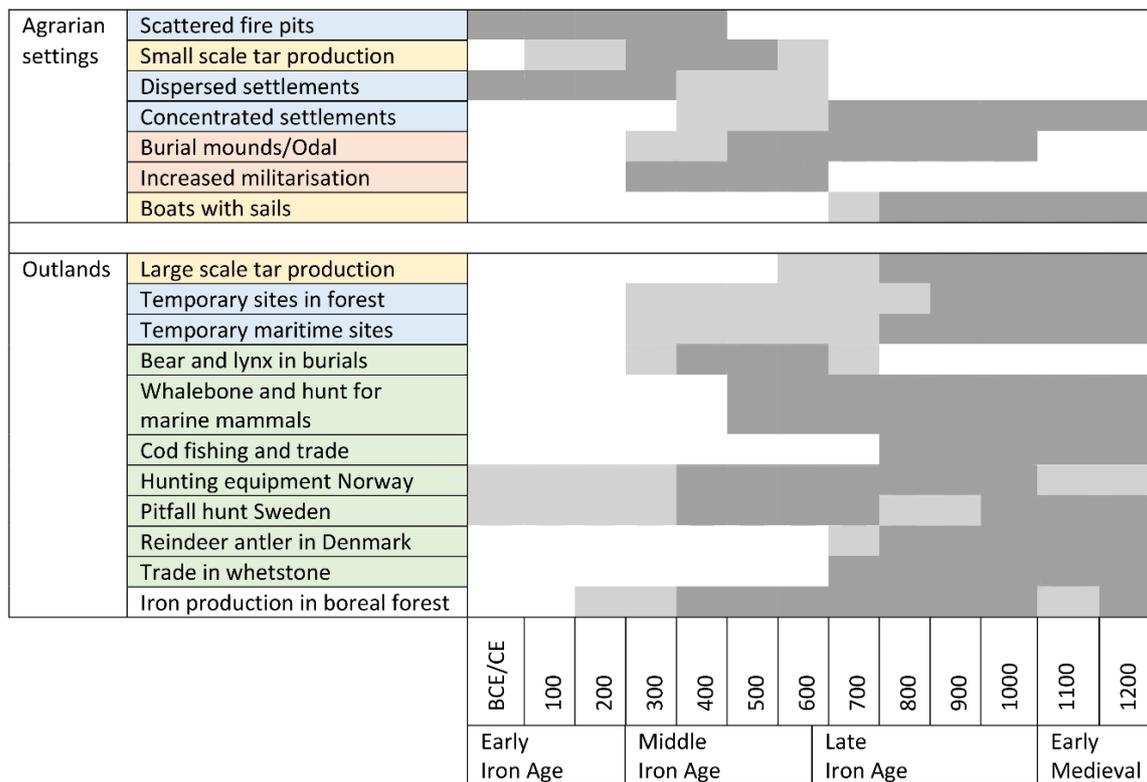


Figure 1. Chronological developments based on present knowledge and the appearance in archaeological empirical material of different phenomena discussed or referred to in the thesis. White – no or as yet very scarce indications, light grey – indications of small-scale activities or initial production, dark grey – extensive indications or large-scale production. The upper part of the table shows changes in the infields, lower part the outland changes. Related phenomena marked with colour coding in the second column.

pitfalls in the boreal forests are analysed using Kernel Density Estimations (KDE) to create a chronological model of pitfall hunting. The second paper is based on a study of raw materials used in the production of gaming pieces. By using a combination of osteological methods and ZooMS, the analyses show that a majority of the Late Iron Age gaming pieces were made from whalebone, primarily from bone of the North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*). Furthermore, the study suggests that these mass-produced and standardised gaming pieces were distributed via extensive networks, dating from as early as the Vendel Period.

In “Viking Age Tar Production and Outland Exploitation” (Hennius 2018) Iron Age tar production is discussed. The production of tar transforms from small-scale production at settlements during the Early Iron Age to large-scale production located in the woodlands during the Late Iron Age. This relocation certainly had major implications for planning the production and work organisation and was probably implemented and conducted on a seasonal

basis with the intention of using the tar as a commodity in supraregional trade networks.

In “Outland Exploitation and the Emergence of Seasonal Settlements” (Hennius 2020b), the emergence of seasonally utilised sites during the Middle Iron Age is discussed, aiming to deepen the understanding of societal development and the interdependence between different types of landscapes and resource areas. The article bridges the infield/outland dichotomy by studying the reorganisation of grazing systems in relation to the emergence of seasonal production sites in the outlands in the middle of the Iron Age from a coherent model of explanation. The development of multi-functional sites for intermittent use in the outlands is related to increasingly stronger claims to and control of land, which is also visible in the agrarian units in the field during the period. This change affects both the work organisation of the actors involved and social relationships. The chronological coherence between outland resource acquisition and the development of the agrarian regions shows an interdependence between different types of landscape.

The final discussion is centred around the five classic questions: *When, What, Where, Who* and *Why*. It elaborates on the chronology, the nature, the geographical scale, the societal organisation and the reasons behind the increased outland exploitation. Even if the questions seem simple, the answers are much more complex, indicating that the societal and economic developments in the Middle Iron Age affected and connected most parts of Scandinavia and tied them together through far-reaching networks.

### **Results**

In contrast to previous assumptions rooted in a model of Viking Age expansion, an intensified outland resource colonisation can be identified already during the Middle Iron Age. The case studies suggest that similar explanatory models can be used to understand the parallel developments seen in different parts of the landscape – the agrarian regions as well as forested or coastal outlands.

Already during the Middle Iron Age, it is possible to identify a largescale landscape utilisation and a surplus production that exceed the needs of ordinary households, as exemplified by hunting using pitfalls, whaling and, towards the end of the period, tar production. Furthermore, the case studies show the presence of the mass production of serially produced items as well as other types of exotic commodities, which are distributed through far-reaching trade networks. The most illustrative example would be the trade in whalebone gaming pieces, but this is supported by other studies and also by other outland resources, such as furs from lynx and bear, or reindeer antler for crafts. The networks can be interpreted as part of a world system connecting distant regions from the Far East to Arctic Scandinavia, but on a local, domestic, scale also as the origin of Late Iron Age network kingdoms.

The interplay between different groups of people – producers and consumers, farmers and hunters – in different parts of the landscape, generated complex, social and economic relations and interdependencies, and furthermore created specific cultural patterns that could be compared to a middle ground in the border

region between the agrarian areas in the south and the boreal forests in the north.

### **Overview**

Overall, the case studies indicate that the outlands were an important driving force in societal development during the Middle Iron Age. The outland perspective used in the thesis enables a broader understanding of resource and raw material exploitation as well as landscape use during the Middle Iron Age, with significance for how to understand societal development from a large-scale perspective. Not only the time-depth, but also the geographical scale, of such outland exploitation was much more extensive than has previously been assumed and included a wide range of resources. The outland exploitation affects the overall social structure, including labour division, organisation of production and social hierarchies, but also power politics, networks and the development of pre-Viking Age trade. Furthermore, it is suggested that many of the characteristics of Late Iron Age society are established at least as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, if not even earlier. The study thus raises the necessity to re-examine models of societal development during the period.

### **Works Cited**

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