

Death as an architect of societies

Burial and social identity during the Viking Age
in South-western Scania

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the subject on how burial was used by Viking Age population of South-western Scania to express their social identity. As opposed to most earlier research concerning Viking Age burials I utilise regional, mourner-centred and practice-based approach.

I am following observations conducted for burials in Denmark by J. Ulriksen (2011), focused on traces of deposition of burned and unburned human remains in the grave fills, the practice of opening the burial and tracing the intersection and overlays of the graves. I have selected the graves from a catalogue of burials in South-eastern Scandinavia compiled by F. Svanberg (2003b) on a basis of displaying possible signs of those practices. In effect, burial grounds at Önsvala, Ljungbacka, Ståvie, Norrvidinge, Trelleborg and Råga Hörstad were selected.

As I perceive social dimension as the most important in this thesis, introduction chapter starts with the definition of social identity as processual in nature, fluent and contextual. Identities are perceived as displayed through performance, following development in gender studies. I understand rituals as a privileged practice, following the theories of ritualisation. Graves are seen as a result of action, and as such, are analysed with stratigraphic observations and observations derived from field anthropology. In the analysis of burial context, the written sources possess only limited significance. They are, however, employed to create a model of social relations in the Viking Age emphasising the importance of social connections for the perception of an individual as a person and his social significance.

In the first chapter, I present the analysis of selected sites, their settlement context and highlight their importance as places, in which society is constructed during funeral ceremonies. In the second chapter of the analysis, I explore the subject of deposition of cremated human remains in inhumation burials. Differences in practice are observed and its intentionality is attested. In the third chapter, I examine the intersections of graves and re-use of burial pits. The practice is viewed as intentional and its possible explanation – as related to the importance of certain areas of the burial grounds, or as the way of displaying social connection, is proposed. In the following fourth chapter, I analyse the deposits of unburned human remains in the fills of inhumation burials. I review critically the evidence for possible human sacrifice and present problems related to reliance on narrations provided by written sources. In the last chapter, I describe the evidence for post-funeral interaction with burial context.

The conclusion, reached in the closing chapter of the thesis, is that the dead were, in fact, in an ongoing relation with the population of the living and through that interaction identities for both were created. The living benefited from possessing a genealogy and the dead were perceived as existing in altered state, as long as social memory of them prevailed. The graves should not be perceived as passive reflections of identities of the deceased and rather viewed in relation to living identities they supported, as they are phenomena that were subjected to change during the on-going process of identification. Final parts of the conclusion are devoted towards considerations about the practice-based theoretical approach for the excavation methodology and towards highlighting limitations of the thesis and problems that need further research.

Introduction

Background

Over 10 years have passed since F. Svanberg published his monumental, two-volume PhD thesis on the construction of the Viking Age as the concept in early modern and modern research (2003a & 2003b). Despite the important observations, about the regional differences in southern Scandinavia, the reception of his work in a hindsight must be described as rather cold. The best example of this can be found in edited by S. Brink popular scientific book: “The Viking World”:

“It has been suggested that this diversity is a signal not of varying treatment of the dead within a single society, but is instead evidence for the illusory nature of the ‘Viking Age’ itself: that the highly regional burial traditions are indicators of distinctive ethnic, social or political groupings that make a mockery of the notion of a pan-Scandinavian culture (Svanberg 2003). The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores the very real, general similarities of material culture within the region (not to mention language and settlement pattern) and focuses only on variations that are nonetheless practiced within a broader, consistent framework.”

Price 2008, p. 259

This quote reflects well the general reaction of the scholars conducting their research within the “pan-Scandinavian” cultural framework. If the diversity is recognised, how the written sources could be used? Where to find the material to compare the evidence? How to create a compelling narration about the past? In my opinion, the answer is to be found in the introduction of larger amount of archaeological theory into research mainly driven by written sources. Examples from archaeologist working with earlier periods of prehistory clearly demonstrate how beneficial it is for the interpretative process.

The quote from Neil Price, initially seems to prove his point – rune stones, jewellery (including famous oval brooches), ship building technique – all is shared through vast regions of Scandinavia. However, if the approach stated in above mentioned quote is further analysed, it is easy to prove that it leads to creation of illusion of similarity and homogeneity through selective approach to archaeological and historical sources.

First of all, focus that is placed on variety of material culture is not congruent with practice-based approach, and second of all the question is on what category of material is the research centred. Reviewing further parts of the chapter, the cause of this illusory similarity is clearly revealed – the focus is placed on the burial practice that I would qualify as elite. One of the observations from F. Svanberg’s thesis was that through their burial customs the elite expressed ideas important for their social circle (Svanberg 2003b, 130–134). If we analyse the evidence connected to the Old Norse language, it will derive mainly from rune stones and manuscripts produced on behalf of the “better off” part of population.

In my opinion, the mono-cultural Viking Age is largely the product of one past social group, that had imposed on us their narration about the events, through production of

tangible and durable monuments and sources. If analysis of the past should be of any value, it needs to be not only specifically spatially located, but also socially located. By this I mean that the researcher should be aware of that the sources usually utilised for the interpretation of the past might be not congruent to his subject of research. The fact that elite, or even more mobile coastal communities, had to create and maintain networks that exceeded their region needs to be noticed. In effect, practices employed by members of these groups had to be understandable not only locally, but also in over-regional way, leading to a different practice. However, we should not treat the possible meanings of those practices as universal, especially, when dealing with rituals. Studies had shown that different social groups may recognise different meanings in the same ritual performance (Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994, 192–193).

The evidence for regional diversity is clearly seen when the focus is placed on less prominent categories of material culture. The analysis of spindle whorls, ceramics, building techniques and others, by M. S. Sindbæk (2009) clearly revealed the differences between the territories of later medieval Denmark. Ch. Fabech proved, working on earlier periods of the Iron Age in Scania, by analysing the landscape qualities argued that settlement pattern and economic basics of existence must have differed among the population of this not so large region (1993). Extrapolating this idea – life in Viking Age Denmark must have dramatically differed from the life on Viking Age Iceland. The environment or the population density – it all must have influenced the daily practice, and thus changed the *habitus* and created different societies.

Disregard for these facts, connected with reliance on written sources, mostly derived from one region (hence displaying a large degree of uniformity) had resulted in establishment of strong research tradition of Viking Age as monoculture – distinct, separate and unique (Urbańczyk 2009a, 137–138). Scandinavian finds or processes taking place in Scandinavia during the Viking Age are seldom placed in a wider European or global context. The expressions of this mindset are not very visible in the scientific journals, where mostly specific problems are tackled, but are clearly visible when attempts are made to reach the public. A suitable example can be again *The Viking World* book. The title obviously can be compared to other titles released by the same publisher: *The Egyptian World* or *The Babylonian World*, which places the not so clearly defined Vikings in the context of well-developed state societies. The illusion of pan-Scandinavian, almost ethnic coherent group is maintained. Modern Scandinavian identity is projected onto the societies of the past, without the consideration that it is partially the final product of a long historical process, involving the same societies.

Another notable example was the large exhibition shown in autumn 2013 in the National Museum in Copenhagen. The inhabitants of Late Iron Age Scandinavia were presented as one group (with minor regional differences), engaged mostly in war-related activities and trade, traveling outside and around the region. The mobility, war and aggression was further emphasised by the centre piece of the “largest longship ever found” from Roskilde. I remember leaving the museum with a sense of disappointment. I was asking myself questions – how is this related to the majority of past populations engaged in agricultural activities through most of the year? How does this relate to the people without the means to travel extensively? The end result of my thoughts is rather depressing: by establishing “Viking studies” as separate branch of research, academia had created a subject that is mostly based on exclusion and cannot provide narrations that would appreciate any kind of social diversity. Universities served the demand by providing people with subject that is mostly based on pop-cultural image of the past population. Although frustration should not

be viewed as a good motivation for writing, it was certainly this feeling that drove me to propose new interpretations, and into the research of burial practices of the Viking Age population of the South-western Scania.

What is this all about?

The research question that the thesis is concerned with is: “How were the graves in South-western Scania employed in construction of social identity by the ritual participants?”

To provide the answer, the mourner agency focused approach is utilised. Traces of past practices and how they were chronologically structured are analysed, with special concern for the burial context as the result of dynamic social and biological action. To provide a theoretical base, a model of “Old Norse” personhood and power relations as social connections is introduced.

The practice and the burial contexts that are the subject of the thesis could be described as banal or simple, especially in comparison to rich Viking Age burials from Jutland, Central Sweden or famous ship graves from Norway. One of the goals of my writing is to prove that, through application of proper methods, valuable information can be discovered also in contexts that do not provide easily accessible, tangible evidence. The focus on exceptional might not be the right approach in studies related to ritual practice (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 342–343). Additionally, I find it important to include the often disregarded individuals, which can result in more complete vision of the Late Iron Age. It is necessary to highlight the exclusion of burials (Back Danielsson 2007, 27) that are used to produce “our fiction about the past” (Fahlander 2008, 32). Discussions about Viking Age burial ritual are usually conducted in a cross-regional manner, on a hand-picked selection of burials, typically from sites such as Birka, Oseberg, Gokstad, Vendel or Valsgärde. Focus on relatively small number of well-known sites can create false idea about Viking Age burial practice among the less educated public, reinforcing the view of chamber grave or a boat grave as a normative category of burial for majority of the population. Recent example of this approach can be found in J. Lund's article *Fragments of conversion: handling bodies and objects in pagan and Christian Scandinavia* (2013). There, burials from across the whole region are chosen to illustrate the nature of "pan-Scandinavian personhood". The graves are richly equipped and located on cemeteries most possibly utilised by completely different social groups. My approach is different – it can be argued, that the graves are still hand-picked, but I am confined to one region, that is labeled as a distinct entity. Furthermore, the modest grave equipment is not viewed as a limiting factor, since the focus is placed on traces of the ritual participants' action.

The narrations about the past most often are closely related to the times in which they are composed. This thesis is no exception. The ideas of social power as formed through quality and number of relations with other individuals and importance of displaying these connections seem to be very contemporary. If one would like to employ catchy metaphors, they are the “Facebook era Vikings”.

The first chapter of the thesis provides the theoretical background for the understanding of rituals, funerals, cemeteries and graves. The methods of analysis are presented and source criticism is conducted. In the last part of the chapter, the model of personhood and social relations is introduced.

The following chapters are devoted to description of traces of ritualised practices and their contextualisation in the light of finds of surrounding regions. At the end of each chapter a short conclusion with possible interpretation is provided.

The last chapter is a summary and a conclusion – the traces of practice described in previous chapters are collated with the theoretical concepts to provide the answer to the research question. Implications of theoretical developments in mortuary archaeology for the methods of archaeological excavations are briefly discussed. In the closing section, the problems and further research perspectives are presented.

The thesis includes an appendix with short description of the South-western Scanian burials chosen displaying traces of practices described in the thesis.

Inspiration – in place of history of research

The interpretations in the frameworks in post processual archaeology, especially in its “social” dimension, are viewed as subjective (Hodder 2004, 28). To recognise this fact, in place of presenting the reader with the list of publications about the burial grounds in South-western Scania in chronological order, I decided to list the publications that I found inspiring for my approach. The information about the sources can be easily obtained by tracking references in the thesis to the literature list. The attempt to understand the author is more difficult. By listing the influences, I hope to bridge the post-structural reader / author divide, if not by a monumental overpass, then just by a modest footpath.

The work to which this thesis is most in debt is the PhD thesis of F. Svanberg (2003a & 2003b). The regional approach, the general description of the burial customs of South-western Scania and the dating of the graves derive mainly from Svanberg’s work. I decided, however, to focus more on traces of practice in the past burials, not the form of the monument. I would argue that these are the true “Death Rituals”. I am also concerned with how the problem of how Viking Age monoculture could be further divided, according to certain social and not strictly spatial differences.

The focus on practice and concern for taphonomy of the burial is derived from another Phd thesis published by the Lund University – *Embodied rituals & ritualised bodies* by Liv Nilsson Stutz (2003). The presented balance between hard scientific approach towards reconstruction of burial contexts and the great knowledge about social sciences and ritual theory was a constant reference point for my own research into the Viking Age burial practices. It is an astonishing discovery – how little concern is placed on the original appearance of the burial and how the observations about the site formation processes are seldom included into the analysis of Late Iron Age graves.

The choice to divert my attention towards the communities that were conducting the rituals, instead of focusing on the fate of the deceased and their presumable journeys through different worlds is partially derived from F. Svanberg’s *Decolonizing the Viking Age* (2003a & 2003b), but I would indicate the article published by T. Oestigaard and J. Goldhahn *From the Dead to the Living. Death as transactions and renegotiations*. (2006) as the most influential. The paper, examining the burial contexts as traces of actions of constructing the society in Iron Age and Bronze Age, formed my approach towards material culture and traces of practice encountered in burials. My attention was further diverted from the presumably “mythological” meanings of observed practice by numerous works of H. Williams, but mostly by his *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (2006). The approach focused on how the

social memory was created and maintained, and how it was utilised in society construction is, in my opinion, more reasonable than attempts to correlate the “mythological” tales of Edda and Saga sources with hand-picked archaeological sites and artefacts.

1. Theory and method

1.1 Ritual, social identity, performance – theoretical foundation

Modern studies concerned with mortuary archaeology, understood within frameworks of the post processual views¹ can only benefit from stating their theoretical foundations clearly. Following development, mainly in the area of gender archaeology, I understand that individuals assume different identities during their life course, and can often simultaneously possess a number of them (Fowler 2001, 1; Preucel & Meskell 2004). In fact, it would probably be more proper to discuss the matter by viewing the phenomena as an ongoing process of identification, during which individuals are observed and categorised by others and themselves on the basis of recognition of similarities and differences (Jenkins 2004, 17–18). It makes social identities highly contextual, as an individual cannot exist without relation to society (Jenkins 2004). The social identity will be viewed as displayed by practice, borrowing the concept of performance of sex and gender from Judith's Butler work *Gender Trouble* (Joyce 2004, 84). An individual is seen there as acting according to norms, embodying them, and by these acts, creating a pattern for later performances by others in a process described as "citation". As this interpretation seems to be a very rigid structure, not leaving a large field for individual agency, it has to be stated, that by the fact that performances always fail to reproduce the norm in an exact way, the structure is in a state of constant change. It can be said, following Giddens, that the structuring properties of social system are the result of practice, but are also the source of form of the practice (Giddens 1984, 25). However, structure should not be viewed as the means of society reproduction, since the reproduction² process is impossible; the change, even if gradual, is inevitable.

Where there is a performance, there must be an audience (that in fact is a part of a spectacle, at least as a reference point). Someone must be judging if the individual conforms in the right way to the role of, for example, "husband", "wife" or "kinsman", "Swede" etc. In case of "performances" related to identities, it would be the collective who passes the verdict and exercise control through institutions. By institutions, similarly to Jenkins, I mean patterns of behaviour in specific settings and situations, that have been established over time. These patterns relate to understandings of "proper" practices related to identities performed. Since institution is related to the behaviour, it is a product of action, and as such possesses a fluent nature, however, to be functional, it has to relate to intersubjective symbolic universe shared

¹ Term post-processual encapsulates many different approaches and it is extremely hard to provide the reader with a clear definition. Following definition from Shaw and Jameson's *Dictionary of Archaeology*, one of the trademarks of this approach would be recognition of subjectivity of interpretations put forward by the researcher, influenced consciously and unconsciously by different ideologies.

² Feminist theory had challenged the classical Marxist division of labour into male production and female reproduction activities. The division was seen as biased — reproduction, classically understood as less valuable repetition, and production as a creative process. In fact, it can be perceived as the same thing, and the division is fake and was introduced to present female labour as less valuable. Although this critique applies mostly to problems of economy and labour, for me it has greater philosophical implications. I am convinced that reproduction is production, as perfect "copies" are not possible. Similarly, applying the concept to Social Sciences — restructuration is in fact creation of a new structure. The old one might still be the template, but it is altered in a conscious or unconscious manner.

by members of the collective (Jenkins 2004, 156–160). In a way, it can be said that the institutions are formed by the intersubjective reception of past and present “citations”. Institution needs to be seen as a way of generating identities (Jenkins 2004, 164); I understand them as “reservoirs” of past “performances”. The patterns of the performance could be related to social roles and, as such, transgress the individual's existence, establishing a norm of what is proper for his successors.

The dynamic approach to a concept of social identities needs as dynamic definition of a ritual. Most suited for the task is the theory of practice, as it is focused on action (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 51). A ritual will be understood as a social action that differentiates itself strategically from other social actions by being a privileged practice³ (Svanberg 2003a, 146ff). It means that actions that could be seen as ordinary, by their occurrence in a special setting became different and somehow marked and separated from everyday context. Through this process they become ritualised (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 362). A necessary element in the process of ritualisation is the adoption of “ritual stance” by the participants. In this mode of behaviour, which is entered consciously, the intentions of action are becoming unimportant. The act itself becomes the reason for performing the action, stipulated by the rules of how it should be performed. The difference is not in the form of action itself, but in the mental state of the ritual's participant, aware of the special context (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 90–107). It is necessary to study the ritualised practice in relation to other aspects of society, as it can be recognised only through relation to other practices (Ekengren 2013, 178; Nilsson Stutz 2003, 53; Svanberg 2003a, 148). A ritual has a power to alter the structure, being generated by it (Nilsson Stutz 2006, 96). Events, taking place during ritualised action influence participants' concepts about the world, forming the base for later rituals, that have to take into account the past happenings, in order to produce a coherent picture of “reality” (Schieffelin 1985, 720). For example, happenings during Kaluli healing ritual influence their knowledge about the spiritual world, forming the base for later rituals, that have to take into account the past events, to produce a coherent picture of “reality” (Schieffelin 1985, 720). Power rituals, such as coronation, are not the display of social order, they are creations of it, producing the divine legitimation for social divisions (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 30–31). Through constraint, by means of ritualisation, of form of action and interaction between the individuals, order is created (Schieffelin 1985, 708). Similarly, change of the process of society construction during funeral and rituals related to the dead, resulted in the change of society, as it will be proposed in the further part of the thesis.

Despite their in fact dynamic nature, rituals can be viewed as conservative (Artelius 2000, 33; Ekengren 2013, 178) but it must be remembered that even continuation of tradition is an active choice by the agent (Artelius & Svanberg 2005, 7). The “continuity”, as it would be a reproductive action, cannot occur as an exact repetition. Abiding to traditions is in fact a constructive process, during which people are convinced about the benevolent legitimising influence of the past on their actions. The reason why change occurred was partially related to how things are remembered, as well as to the fact that in the oral societies past needs to serve the needs of the present. The example might be the tradition of Sami extensively using pitfalls for hunting. When modern members of the nation are confronted with archaeological traces of the custom, recorded in the 17th c., they are reluctant to connect this behaviour to their ancestors. Events not congruent with the present need for social memory are forgotten

³ Practice is defined as an action in relation to structure. It emerges from structure, but also has a potential to change it (Nilsson-Stutz 2006, 95).

(Bergman 2006, 155). Intentionality and structuration are also important traits of rituals (Ekengren 2013, 176).

The advantage of understanding rituals within the frameworks of practice theory is the possibility of comprehend them unrelated to cosmology or transcendent meaning, and thus to focus on actions of agents. According to the theory of practice, the meaning of a ritual is created through embodied practice, and can vary from participant to participant, and often is not clearly verbalised (Nilsson Stutz 2006, 96). The focus on body engagements in the acts of carrying out certain actions can lead to understanding the ritual as a performance, where agents communicate symbols through different media (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 34). This approach can, however, create a falsified static picture of reality, and reduce the creative potential of the practice, viewing it as repetitive communication of more abstract ideas. Here, two concepts must be emphasised to reconnect performance to practice. First, the meaning of a symbol has to be seen as created through action⁴(Ekengren 2006, 112; Schieffelin 1985, 723), and as such open to alterations, as any other part of structure. Secondly, participants' subjective perception and performance of rituals also must play a role in creation of their meaning.

I believe that by participating in the shared *habitus* on a certain level, the performance must be able to create a shared embodied experience. The example from the healing rituals of the Kaluli presents that the necessary engagement of the participants with the performances is established by the use of the known landmarks by the medium, during his song singing. Through the landmarks, the spirit appearing to participants can be identified, and the speculations on who is going to appear engage the audience (Schieffelin 1985, 713–714). Through the use of familiar concepts, and the relation to the daily experiences of the community, it is possible to conduct the ritual, performative in nature, without any form of “script” that would assign the roles to the public. The shared experiences, derived from the participation in the same structure are enough, as participant, each by himself, provides the meaning and intention to the ritualised action.

I will argue that communal rituals success would depend on its efficiency in creating a shared embodied experience, through which new or old meanings could be communicated. The participants can judge the way in which the ritual is conducted by comparison to earlier events, voicing their negative opinions if it does not live up to their expectations⁵ (Schieffelin 1985, 717–720). The rituals have to follow certain rules, but they do not need to be explicit. If the ritualised action is carried away accordingly, the ritual can be considered as successfully conducted (Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994, 128).

1.2 Funerals as ritual transformative performances

Processual approaches are unsuited towards studying repercussions and nature of funeral ceremony, since they focus only on the deceased, its presumable social status, economy and ecology understood in positivistic and falsely objective fashion (Ekengren & Nilsson Stutz 2005, 11; Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 7; Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 27).

⁴ This can be related to the concept of “positional meaning” of symbol developed by Turner, where it has to be understood in relation to other symbols and actions (Ekengren 2013, 179)

⁵ It does not mean that the innovation is not possible, it just means that the changes introduced must be created in accordance to certain, prescribed by structure principles. Participants must view them as necessary and adequate.

Current approaches recognise the fact that funeral rites are in fact transformations of social identities and personhoods (Back-Danielsson 2007, 250; Ekengren 2006, 109; Mansurd 2006; 133; Oestigaard 2000, 42; Oestigaard 2006, 17; Williams 2008, 240) both of the deceased individual and the surviving communities (Ekengren 2013, 176; Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 29; Nilsson Stutz 2008, 23). The transformation occurs on social, cosmological (religious) (Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 5; Oestigaard 2000, 53; Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006, 46; Svanberg 2003a, 125; Williams 2006, 9) but also biological level (Nilsson Stutz 2008, 23).

On a cosmological plane, the goal of the funeral is to create an ancestor⁶, a being suitable for the community of the dead (Back-Danielsson 2007, 250; Ekengren 2006, 109) by employing ritual to bring the deceased into state desirable by the supernatural powers (Kristoffersen & Oestigaard 2007). The process can result also in cosmological transformation of place, objects or landscape (Gansum 2008, 141).

The rituals, understood as performances, could serve to recreate the cultural boundaries and institutions, manifest the alteration in social structure caused by the death of the community member (Artelius & Svanberg 2005, 7; Ekengren 2013, 176; Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 37–38) or legitimise power, making the social order appear as instituted by the divine (Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 10). The performances could result in creation of a monument, that can be seen as a mnemonic device, that could be used to recall the embodied memories of the ritual, to support the social order in the time of need (Hållans-Stenholm 2006, 431; Nilsson Stutz 2008, 25; Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 37; Pedersen 2006, 351; Svanberg 2003a, 145). The creation of social memory through employment of performance and material culture can be viewed as the most important outcome of the funeral ceremony (Williams 2006, 12), it must be, however, stated that even this social memory cannot be perceived as stable and unchanging part of structure (Graham 2009, 54), especially amongst oral communities, and should be rather viewed as a process. By successful creation of the society, the dead can be seen as a transformed “node” in the network in relation to whom the descendants identity can be established. By the performance of rituals, erection of monuments and engagements with them, the descendants’ construct their identity (Ekengren & Nilsson Stutz 2009, 12; Williams 2006, 26).

However, creation of memory through performance cannot be seen as an easy task, when the meaning of symbols must be regarded as constructed during rituals by the context of their employment. The performance must be ground enough in habitus to communicate and embody the “right” experience in the participants and, at the same time, be innovative enough to be memorable (Williams 2006). It is for this reason, I believe, that it can be stated that funeral rites are often connected to the central normative ideas, patterns of behaviour or values of communities (Artelius & Svanberg 2005, 7; Svanberg 2007, 145). However, I believe that because of the process of practice influencing the structure, all the above mentioned traits can have their stability questioned. A key factor in recognition of the ideas central for different communities is an identification of a right time frame. The process of change can be seen as gradual in many cases. The understanding of community must overstep the spatial

⁶ In his critique of overuse of the term ancestor, Whitley provides a minimal definition of the being as someone who has procreated, died, but has descendants who remember him or her. He also recognised the fact that the ancestors might be worshipped collectively, and that the status is not achieved by every dead person (Whitley 2001, 122–123). I agree with the statement that the term is overused in archaeology, but I do not agree with the minimal definition. The emphasis is placed too much on genetic connection between ancestor and his successors. In my opinion, the definition should include non biological or other links as well as imagined ancestors, that are a social product.

dimension, and reach also into the realm of mentality of the past people. However, as much as the attempt to reach into the past to propose an idea about the discourse that created the norms and established daily practice might be tempting (Meskell 2001), it can only be done when the sources are sufficient. I believe that it is possible in case of the Old Norse societies, as not only archaeological material, but also limited textual evidence is available which, that if analysed in a right way, can provide a hypothesis about the normative ideas of society.

1.3 Deconstructing graves and cemeteries

It is a fact that the modern categories might not be congruent when describing past societies, hence they need to be deconstructed before application in research (Meskell & Purcell 2004, 123). There is a need to understand our modern mental association with words like “grave” or “cemetery” to be aware of how our ideas are transferred to the past material. It is impossible to interpret the reality from the neutral stance (Kaliff 2005, 133), and archaeologists should be aware of the modern influence. The danger of applying “common sense” interpretations unconsciously is a constant threat.

The term “grave” seems to be of special importance, as it is itself charged with emotional meaning in our culture (Kaliff 2005, 130). Traditionally, grave is viewed as a container for the body of the deceased (Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 2) – its resting place (Kaliff 2005, 138). It is an archaeological feature in which body and objects are placed intentionally (Williams 2006, 117). This definition can lead to confusion, both on a level concerned with identification of the burials, and with interpretation of their use by the society. Focus on actual human remains makes interpretation of features like “empty graves”, so called “cenotaphs,” problematic. The other result of this kind of thinking is that the definition of a grave is a rather broad one, encapsulating such different features as stone settings and small cremation pits, that can occur at the same site (Kaliff 2005, 138). The fact that human remains have been recovered from many features related to settlement sites, including postholes, thresholds and property boundaries (Back Danielson 2007, 245) makes it clear that not every feature in which human body parts were placed fits modern idea of the grave. It also leads to realisation that not every funeral ceremony has to end with a burial (Williams 2006, 117), and large part of past population probably did not get buried at all. The fact that the amount of burned bone found in Iron Age burials in Denmark varies from couple hundred grams to couple of grams, when the whole body should produce from around 1,500 to 2,500 grams (Ulriksen 2011, 189) brings to consideration a possibility, that by the focus on human remains many other features, possibly used in funerary rites, might have been accidentally placed in a grave category (Kaliff 2005, 138–139). After osteological investigation of burials from Early Iron Age Caroline Arcini proposed, comparing urn cremation burials and cremation pit or layers, that the second category might in fact include pyre sites (2005, 69). In many cases, features situated on the burial ground are interpreted and registered as the grave, as soon as any signs of human remains is discovered, what probably leads to misinterpretation of far more complex traces of past practices.

The second problem connected to “graves” as concepts is related to modern understanding of a burial as a stagnant place. I would argue that it is related to the fact that archaeology is a western discipline, that was born in very special circumstances. This view of a grave as a static monument reflects western thought about dead being inactive. Following Christian beliefs, they can be viewed as passively waiting for the Judgment Day. The same

ideas were transferred onto past societies. Graves cannot be seen as fixed monuments – they have to be seen as the outcome of practices that were concerned with the transformation of the dead (Back-Danielsson 2007, 250; Ekengren 2006, 109; Mansurd 2006; 133; Oestigaard 2000, 42; Oestigaard 2006, 17; Williams 2008, 240; 2006 120). For this reason, they should be viewed not as a passive “scene” communicating the message about social identities of the deceased and the mourners, but rather as an effect of sequence of actions (Ekengren 2013, 179; Williams 2006, 120) that were presenting the change. Another part of the westernised view of the grave is reluctance to admit that burial is not the final use of place in which monument is located. In many cultures graves can be re-visited to bury someone, or retrieve a part of a body or item, as well as corpses could be exhumed to be reused in other contexts (Williams 2006, 117). The graves can be seen as possessing agency (Ekengren 2013, 176; Williams 2006, 120) as they can be seen as the means of communication during the ceremonies and after them, influencing social life as carriers and producers of meanings and memories. They were constructed, used (not only for the funerals), and maintained by the past societies (Back-Danielson 2007, 259). It is important to recognise the fact that death, however universal for humankind, could have been perceived differently to modern assumption, not as the end but as an alteration of existence (Gansum 2008, 141).

The treatment of the dead, and traces of actions connected to transformation processes occurring on religious, social and biological planes should be contextualised in every society individually. It corresponds to the definition of a ritual, it has to be examined in relation to other practice. It is important to remember that the term “grave” might not be congruent with terms used in the discourse regarding treatment of the dead in the past societies in question.

Disputing the “grave” as a bound and universal category has led to criticism and deconstruction of the concept of cemetery or burial ground as a space dedicated for commemoration and separation of the dead (Härke 2001, 11; Schmidt 2005, 85). In many cases, the analysis of age groups, as well as sex and stress indicators, points to conclusion that only a fraction of past population was buried on a cemetery (Maldonado 2013, 9), what forces the perspective of viewing the place beyond its functional aspect of a place for removal of dead bodies belonging to the community members (Härke 2001, 11). Further, its separation as a space dedicated solely to the dead must also be questioned. Roman and prehistoric cemeteries were often placed along the roads, incorporating the dead in the daily movement, in opposition to later Christian tradition of placing the dead in the destinations to which an intentional journey had to be made (Härke 2001, 16). The activities that can be seen as “daily” and “non-ritual” could have also taken place at those sites⁷. In earlier parts of prehistory, graves can be perceived as features included in the settlement (Schmidt 2005, 85).

Not all ritualised activities that take place at cemeteries are funerary rites or rites of commemoration of the dead (Härke 2001, 13). On some of the Anglo-Saxon burial grounds traces of judicial practice have been found (Maldonado 2013, 24), *Ting* sites of Early Medieval and Late Iron Age Sweden are often located in the vicinity of large burial mounds (Brink 2004, 207).

It seems that in many prehistoric societies, cemeteries were in fact multipurpose sites, both in cosmological and social dimension. It is important to notice that the living people were

⁷ For example at the site at Bo gård in Östergötland, a forge from Vendel Period was found on a cemetery from Migration Period and both structures were in use up to the early Viking Age (Larsson 2005, 105).

the ones utilising the area in a process of society construction – even though their actions, might have been steered by the concern for the well-being of the dead. It is also necessary to question labelling sites as the cemeteries solely on the basis of uncovered human remains in multiple features, as the concept is filled with modern preconceptions. Again, contextualisation of the discoveries is important to reach more valid conclusions.

The focus on rituals as practice results in necessity of choosing a research method that allows for tracing the actions of participants, with less focus on possible meanings that could have been communicated. This thesis is little concerned with subjects of where the dead people went, understood as a cosmological dimension. It is more concerned with how they influenced the living in their process of identification.

1.4 Method

Two categories of sources are employed in this thesis. The first is the archaeological record considered here as the primary source, most accurate, since it can be viewed upon as materialisation of the ritual practices (Nilsson Stutz 2006, 95; Carlie 2006, 206). The second are the written sources, mainly from the later part of the Middle Ages than the period in question, that are employed in the attempt of reconstruction of the past mentality.

1.4.1 Approaches to archaeological material

The material was selected from among around 230 burials located in South-western Scania, registered in a catalogue from F. Svanberg's *Death rituals in South-East Scandinavia AD 800–1000* on a basis of displaying signs of practices such as: deposition of items, human and animal remains in the fills of the burials, re-openings of the grave and placing a grave over the older burial, as described by Jens Ulriksen in *Vikingetidens gravskik i Danmark* (2011). The focus placed only on those evident traces of ritualised practice is caused by the limited time that can be devoted towards writing a master thesis. Each grave in South-western Scania, as an intentional deposit is, in fact, a trace of a ritualised practice. By following choice done by Ulriksen, an important issues can be further supported – the often mentioned connection between South-western Scania and Zealand, as well as the necessity of treating graves as places that were revisited or altered, even after the funeral. The paper or dissertation re-evaluating the mortuary evidence from the region, with focus placed on the actions of funeral's participants, belonging to the period of the whole Late Iron Age would be highly desirable.

Since a feature, that is identified as a grave can be viewed as the result of a sequence of actions (Ekengren 2013, 179; Gansum & Oestigaard 2004, 69) an important part of its interpretation is understanding the course of events. This is achieved by examination of stratigraphy of the burial. By following the rule that the stratae are superimposed, the bottom ones can be usually perceived as older and the top ones as younger (Gansum & Oestigaard 2004, 69), and thus a relative chronology of events on the site can be established. A grave however is a dynamic structure, where many alterations take place and the knowledge about the site formation process is crucial for its accurate interpretation (Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 131). That is why some observations based on archaeoethanatology (*anthropologie de terrain*) are necessary. As a person with only limited training in human osteology, I lay no claim to describing my research as detailed and conclusive examination of the burial contexts,

however, I feel that it is necessary to try to employ observation based on archaeoethanatology to answer many questions regarding Viking Age burial customs in South-western Scania.

Archaeoethanatology is a method based on analysis of spatial relations between bones in the grave, which allows to interpret how they moved as a result of different processes. On the basis of these observations it is possible to conceptualise the original appearance of the burial context (Willis & Tayles 2009, 547). It differentiates between two main processes that were involved into creation of a burial as a phenomenon encountered by the excavators. First, there are the intentional and unintentional actions of individuals that shape the original appearance of the deposit at the time of the funeral; second, the results of taphonomic processes (Harris & Tayles 2012, 231). It is of high importance to recognise the second group of processes not as destructive, but altering the information (Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 137). The taphonomic process can be further divided into two categories, one, that is a result of human action, and the other that can be characterised as bioturbation – a result of natural occurrences (Harris & Tayles 2012, 231). Dislocation of human remains follows the rules dictated by decomposition of the soft tissues and articulations, and the laws of gravity (Duday & Guillon 2006, 131). In this thesis, methods based on observations by field anthropologists will be used to determine three important qualities of the burial context.

I will try to define the deposition as primary or secondary. In archaeoethanatology, the primary context is understood as situating the corpse in the site where its decay will take place (Duday 2009, 15; Duday & Guillon 2006, 125). To interpret the burial as primary context, it is necessary to observe if the anatomical connections between the bones are retained. The knowledge about the different rate of decomposition of articulations is essential. Archaeoethanatology differentiates between the liable articulations, that decompose faster, and the persistent articulations, with slower rate of decomposition. Liable articulations include the cervical vertebrae, hands, distal bones of the feet and the connection between the scapulae and the thorax. Persistent articulations are the atlas and the occipital bone, the lumbar vertebrae, the sacroiliac joint, knees, ankles and the tarsal bones (Duday & Guillon 2006, 127; Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 152). If the liable articulations, that decompose during several weeks after death are in anatomical order, the primary deposit of the body is indicated (Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 152). Secondary context is characterised by the deposition of bones in a transformed state in the place of their later discovery (Duday 2009, 14).

I will also use archaeoethanatomical methods to try to determine the character of space in which decomposition took place. There are two types of space that can be differentiated in the burial contexts. One is known as *internal*, and it corresponds to the volume of the cadaver, it is created when the soft tissues decompose. Second type is known as *external*, and can be characterised as the space outside the volume of the corpse (Duday & Guillon 2006, 138; Harris and Tayles 2012, 231). Additional type of space that can be created in the burial is the *secondary external space*, that is formed when an object placed next to the body decomposes at a slower rate than the cadaver, creating a void to which skeletonised remains can move (Duday & Guillon 2006, 140; Harris & Tayles 2012, 231). Another factor influencing the movement of the remains, and allowing the interpretation of the original character of the burial, is the speed of sediment penetration. This process is dependant on the soil conditions, but general two types can be distinguished – the immediate filling, when the empty spaces created by decay are progressively filled with soil, what occurs when porous or fluid sediments are in direct contact with the cadaver or delayed, when there is an obstacle blocking the immediate infiltration (Wyllies & Tayles 2009, 548; Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 154). In case of immediate filling, the bones that are in the state of disequilibrium, as the articulations and soft tissue decompose, can generally move only in a

limited way, corresponding most often to the internal space of burial context (the volume of the cadaver) (Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 154). When the sediment is penetrating the container in the delayed manner and external space is present, the bones may fall outside the initial volume of the body (Duday & Guillon 2006, 138; Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 154). In case of the individuals buried in supine position, the movement is caused by the opening of the pelvis and dislocation of the pubic symphysis. Os coxae pushes the femora heads, placed in the acetabular fossa causing the lateral rotation of femora, that leads to fall of patellae (Duday & Guillon 2006, 138; Willis & Tayles 2008, 548; Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 154–155). The presence of the container can also cause the effect of transversal compression of the skeleton. It is manifested by the verticalization of the clavicles, medial rotation of the humeri and movement of the scapulae. As this process can be caused by a number of reasons, such as tight shrouds, narrow grave pit, a narrow coffin or V- or round-bottomed burial container (Duday & Guillon 2006, 144; Harris & Tayles 2012, 232; Willis and Tayles 2009, 548) observations of remains have to be correlated with others, such as placement (and movement) of grave goods or shape of the pit⁸, to draw a conclusion.

The third reason why I will employ the methods derived from archaeoethanatology is the possibility to investigate the time of deposition of human remains of the double or multiple burials. It is possible to establish chronology by investigating the perturbations in the corpses, that might have been caused by additional burial. It is also possible to investigate the spatial relations among the corpses and evaluate the state of liable articulations, if they were in contact (Duday & Guillon 2006, 150; Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 305). However, there is a limit to possibility of determining of the type of deposition – a successive burial in the space of few weeks, before the liable articulations decompose, can have a similar appearance to the simultaneous one (Duday & Guillon 2006, 150).

Further observations will be made to trace possible reopening of the burials. E. Aspöck points to different type of grave fill resulting from pits dug into the burial, parts of grave furnishings, deposited finds, human remains and snail shells in the grave fill, disturbance of the structure inside of the grave, non-anatomical position of the human remains, unusual position of the grave goods and missing and fragmented grave furniture as possible signs of interference with the burial context (Aspöck 2011, 320).

It is crucial to try to reconstruct the circumstances of deposition of the body and the grave goods, since their meaning is directly related to the context of finds, and performative and dynamic nature of the rituals might be most important for the participants (Ekengren 2013, 182; Williams 2006, 118).

The fact that analysis done in the thesis is based on the field documentation of the past excavations is the obvious limiting factor. Documentation emphasises the visual qualities of the context, downplaying others (Witmore 2007, 548). The graves are usually recorded as single plan drawings and photos, which, due to their two-dimensional nature, have an effect of reinforcing the approach treating burials as static phenomena, concerned with display of the dead and grave goods (Williams 2011, 179). Not every important for the analysis detail is visible, remains could be moved or removed (Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 206) or information about the position of the finds in the fill is lacking. A limiting factor is also the varied state of preservation of the skeletal remains. In many cases, as direct illustrations are not enclosed, I had to rely on the information recorded in the reports, and so was forced to believe the interpretations of the excavators. When a critical examination is an expected outcome of the

⁸ The shape of the burial pit is not as straightforwardly delimited as archaeologists tend to think. The discolourations caused by the spread of organic material in the soil, that is most often taken as the demarcation of the feature, can be caused by the activity of earthworms (Duday & Guillon 2006, 142–144)

thesis, situations of this kind are highly undesirable. However, past studies had proven that useful conclusions could be reached by examining the field documentation according to new methods and developments (i.e.: Nilsson-Stutz 2003; Wyllies and Tayles 2009; Harris and Tayles 2012). Archaeological material in this thesis is approached in a spirit of an opinion formulated by H. Härke, that the quality of data should not prevent the archaeologist from raising questions, as only this can lead to identification of fields that need further research (Williams & Sayer 2011, 14).

1.4.2 Written sources – criticism and description of the approach

Unreflective approach towards textual historical sources can cause more harm, than help in research on past societies (Staecker 2005, 3). Past research regarding Viking Age seldom observed the problem of regional and social variety. This situation creates a problematic methodological discord, as I am not going to treat descriptions of practices from other regions of Scandinavia as exact reflections of what was done in South-western Scania. Results of research concerning different region of the North, especially when based on written evidence, should be treated as analogies, but used as consciously as those derived from social anthropology (Back-Danielsson 2007, 34). They are permitted on the basis of displaying similar social structure, technical knowledge or natural environment by the subjects, or geographic and time related proximity of societies (Kaliff 2005, 134). They cannot be viewed as direct explanations of phenomena.

1.4.3 The illusion of uniformity – critique of written accounts

The main reservation towards written record are drawn from the nature of the Old Norse religion. Matters of belief were a part of term *Forn Siðr* that encapsulated legal customs, ownership and general rules of behaviour (Andrén et al. 2006, 12). These ideas were probably highly differentiated on levels of chronology, regionality, social hierarchy and individual concepts (Schjødt 2009, 10ff). The written sources, such as Eddaic poems and sagas, written down on Iceland after conversion to Christianity, reflect the ideology of the upper-classes of society (Schjødt 2009, 15) and are male biased (Back-Danielsson 2007, 30). Probably the same can be stated about the other category of written evidence used – the medieval Scandinavian law codes, that might have possessed some evidence about older legal customs (Sawyer 2000, 19). The third category of written evidence used in this paper are the relations of the Arab travellers and traders that encountered Norseman, mostly in the area of present-day Russia. The main problem with these accounts, except the general distance from the area in question, is the fact that most probably all the writers had to use interpreters, what could lead to obscuring of the meaning of the witnessed action (Sawyer 2000, 28). Also, they were focused on behaviours that they found strange and amusing.

Further difficulties are related to the fact that the societies inhabiting Scandinavia in the Late Iron Age were communities relying mostly on oral transition of knowledge, what makes them different from cultures with developed literacy (Brink 2005, 60). Narratives and stories in oral communities are not just told, but performed (Back-Danielson 2007, 34). This makes the meaning not only contextual when it comes to understanding of the spatial location of the performance (Brink 2005, 70) but also depends on observation of bodily engagements of the participants. The agency of the audience must be recognised, as story must be retold to be transferred (Back-Danielsson 2007, 31; Brink 2005, 61). Because of that, it must appeal to

receivers of oral performance and take into consideration current trends and fashions (Back-Danielsson 2007, 31). What also seems to be one of the characteristics of the oral communities is a very instrumental approach towards the past; only this what is needed for the explanation of the present structure of society is remembered (Back-Danielsson 2007, 32; Brink 2005, 91). Past does not exist in any objective way. The oral culture that was written down, until that point was exposed to constant alteration, and large part of meanings was not convertible in an exact sense into writing. What is also important, the manuscripts were then re-written and re-interpreted by later scribes. Copying them resulted in even more distorted transmission (Back-Danielsson 2007).

Problematic is also the context in which most of the sources were written down. Iceland, according to some scholars, should not be treated like a tribal or kin-based community in fossil state, presenting the “Old Germanic” power structures (Schjødt 2009, 11; Urbańczyk 2009a, 153). Instead, the system implemented on Iceland should be viewed in a context of economic capacity of society to nourish and maintain the centralised power. With the lack of external threat of invasion, due to the remoteness of the Island and little access to luxury goods – Iceland was simply too poor to afford a king (Urbańczyk 2009a, 150-152). To resolve the problem of implementing order, system based on tradition and collective pressure had evolved (Urbańczyk 2009a, 153). Since traditions were transmitted as the product of oral culture, they cannot be viewed as unchanging and ancient. The past was used in a very instrumental manner by Icelanders, as a tool in creating social pressure or to claim land, as studies based on *Book of Icelanders* combined with archaeological survey have proven. The attitude toward heathen past on Iceland has also to be viewed in this way. In opinion of R. Simek Icelanders upper-class utilised their knowledge about past customs in their research, works of art and political machinations. He compares the attitudes of “Saga period” to renaissance Europe, with extensive use of mythological themes in works of art and literature (Simek 2006, 377). Further argument against using Icelandic source material in uncritical and unreflective manner was risen by S. Brink. He explained the dichotomy of cultivated landscape and forest, presented in many literary works as the reflection of the ecological situation on the island. Associations of forest as unbuild and chaotic environment were connected to the fact that it was destroyed there (Brink 2004b, 299–301). Its status of it was probably different in continental Scandinavian communities where there is evidence of use of forest resources, forming an important part of economy in certain landscapes. Placing sources in their social, ecological and chronological context provides enough arguments to treat them with caution, especially when applied to different region and a different social group.

There is, however, another group of sources, that in a way contradict the image of Old Norse societies as completely illiterate – rune stones. They cannot be treated, at least during the Viking Age as a reflection of literacy, they are still a product of predominantly oral culture. The recorded statements are short, follow a pattern from stone to stone and have to be understood in a larger context of place in which they are placed (Brink 2005, 67–68). Next section of the thesis will be devoted to the analysis of works connected to reconstruction of social structure. I need to emphasise that the older research was conducted in the theoretical frameworks that allowed much more cross regional comparison than mine, and the results might not be applicable.

1.5 Concept of a person

New trends in archaeology tend to view personhood as a product of interaction between the individuals (Graham 2009, 53) that has to be constantly maintained through social action. In this chapter, I would argue that this approach is congruent to the concepts of Viking Age power relations. It is possible to view the Late Iron Age individuals as persons depending on their potentiality of creating social interactions. Belonging to a group was important, since the Scandinavian judicial system was focused on the collective. The group shared the guilt for crimes, received compensation and passed the verdict (Semple & Sanmark 2013, 354). Only the family and social group created through establishment of positive social relation could protect the individual, as there was no institutional power strong enough to enforce the legal rulings (Kalmring 2010, 281).

In order to study the concept of a person in a social dimension, it is important to discern how the transition from object to a person capable of legal action occurred. In my opinion, it is possible to recognise the key aspect of personhood – possibility of social interaction, through the studies of how slaves became freedmen and how freedmen became fully free society members.

1.5.1 Slaves and freedmen

Slaves were not recognised as human beings in the legal sense in Scandinavian societies – they were generally regarded as property of their owner (Brink 2008). According to later medieval provincial law codes, they did not receive compensation for injuries, it was paid to their master, as it would be in case of a damaged object or killed animal. The slaves also did not pay fines for their crimes, it was the responsibility of their owner. Brink explains the legal situation of slaves as the result of not being a member of family group (2008).

The act of freeing a slave was a public event that took place at the ting site and later at the church. The freed person was still dependant on his master, achieving a semi-free status. In Danish case, people like that were called *Leisingi* (Sawyer 2000, 39–40). The act is often seen as a form of adoption of a person to a family (Sawyer 2000, 40), but in my opinion viewing the matter from a different perspective can be beneficial.

Hermanson, writing about the power of Early Medieval Scandinavian monarchs claims that it was based on alliances created through friendship, marriage and patron-client relations, that needed to be nourished through gift exchange and feasts (2011, 65). As the Scandinavian kings, before and also for some time after the introduction of Christianity, were probably looked upon as “regular” but more successful members of society (Varenius 1998, 18), I would suggest that this kind of strategy was crucial for every free person. The scale of accumulated social power depended on the resources of the person and their personal ambition. In this light, the freedom can be viewed as a gift, that the *Leisingi* repaid by becoming a loyal follower of their former master for several generations. The freedman became legally recognised as a human being, through the construction of the social link with the former master. Although probably the individual remained on an inferior position through the rest of his life, it was a significant improvement over the objectifying status of the slave. A prove for a connection between the former slave and a former master can be the rune stone from Hørning, raised by Toke after the death of his former master who gave him his freedom (Stoklund 1991, 286). In this case, the freedman seemed to feel obliged to commemorate his patron, possibly partially paying off the alteration of his status.

1.5.2 Person as a network

After analysing rune stones mentioning the degree of kinship relation or any relation between men, Varenius concluded that every person was in a network constituted by horizontal bonds with his peers and vertical bonds with his superiors or dependants (1998, 23). By recognition of the former slave as a dependant on the public legal assembly or at the church, the former master introduced the individual into society providing him with first vertical link.

The reason why the act can be seen as adoption (Sawyer 2000, 40) performed in order to provide a person with a family guarding their interests (Brink 2008), is the fact that in the family all types of the relations, both horizontal with siblings, and vertical with parents and children are present (Varenius 1998, 24). The free person is born into a network of social dependencies of their parents. The freedman, as an outsider, must be integrated into it to become the society member. However the family should not be viewed as a basic social unit (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993, 166–167). In my opinion, an individual was the most primal node in the network of social dependencies. This could lead to a situation in which kinsmen, through participation in different networks, would end up in opposing groups in a state of conflict (Varenius 1998, 24). Icelandic family sagas often depict a situation of generational conflict (Hállans Stenholm 2012, 67–68), which can indicate that it was possible to go against the will of your parents while trying to establish your own network of alliances. The reorientation from basic nuclear family as the main building block of society (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993, 166) to more individually focused approach should lead to review the ideas of marriages as strategies of building alliances⁹.

In the Icelandic language, there was no word describing a concept similar to a society, the term closest to it translates as “our law” (Svanberg 2003a, 130). The participation in a group tied by different social relations meant that the person could participate in the legal system based on the collective practices (Semple & Sanmark 2013, 534). To become an outlaw in fact meant to be excluded from this network of mutual obligations and to be striped from the benefit of protection it provided. The personal freedom should not be understood according to modern concepts, since being a dependant tied by social obligations to a powerful figure could be a desirable state for an individual (Varenius 1998, 17–18; 2001, 252–253). In return for fulfilling the duties of a follower, the individual could count on protection

⁹ The current approach towards marriage in Old Norse societies focuses on its role as establishing horizontal ties of kinship between two families (Magnúsdóttir 2008, 42). In my opinion, this approach is not congruent with the model of kinship and other social relations proposed for the societies in question. According to analysis of rune stones, but also sagas, the kinship system of Old Norse societies can be classified as bilateral (Magnúsdóttir 2008, 42; Sawyer & Sawyer 1993, 167, Varenius 1998, 19). This meant that only unmarried siblings had the same relatives (Magnúsdóttir 2008, 42). The social connections and power relation in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages should be viewed as personal, tied to particular individual (Hermanson 2011, 64–65; Vogt 2010, 12). The fact that the woman did not severed ties with her family, is not pointing to establishing the new social unit, as Sawyer and Sawyer interpret it (1993, 169); it points towards the preservation of already created social links of dependencies and superiorities that she could possess. The few instances in which a woman was able to divorce her husband, act against his will or execute political decisions known from sagas, describe individuals who had a higher social position than their husbands (Magnúsdóttir 2008, 46). In later provincial laws from Denmark and Sweden, a married couple went into the institution called *félag*, in which they shared the ownership of moveable wealth and land with the exception of inherited plots. Different situation is known from Norway and Iceland, where the couple was not forced to establish *félag*, and both parties kept possession of their land and things (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993, 174). The restrained, but still visible economic independence of the married individuals points to a conclusion that they both possessed some degree of autonomy. Women should not be viewed as means of making a connection, but possibly also as people with their own networks.

from his lord, as if he failed to protect his subordinates, he would be viewed as weak (Hermanson 2011, 69–71).

In my opinion, the family could serve as a base for producing the social relations, providing the individual with some economics or reputation related basis, but its extend went beyond biological relatives. Kinship could be constructed artificially through the links of being a foster or godparent and marriage (Vogt 2010, 12; Varenius 1998, 24). Horizontal ties and vertical ties were constructed and supported by acts of friendship and gift giving (Hermanson 2011, 63–64). The Scandinavian kinship was not only bilateral or focused on an individual (Magnúsdóttir 2008, 42), it was also strategically used to create a power base (Vogt 2010, 9–11) and has to be seen as mainly constructed and maintained through performances that “cited” past performances, regarded as proper in light of particular social institutions. Discussing the social organisation as based on family groups is a reductive approach. The term *fréodas* from Anglo-Saxon legal codes, since they practised a similar bilateral kinship system, can be a better description of the Early Medieval reality. It is not a clearly defined conglomerate of kinsman, family by marriage and friends (Sayer 2011, 152). In my opinion, such loosely defined groups formed the social units of the Viking Age Scandinavia, where a person was only as strong as many followers they could call upon in their network.

This approach can provide a model in which society is not divided in a strict hierarchical way, the position of the person is contextual, it depends on what part of their network is active during the social interaction. In this model groups of supporters are dynamic and can change from case to case, as individuals constantly have to make decisions about supporting each other.

1.5.3 Land as a Token

In Early Medieval Europe the land is often viewed as the basis from which power emerges, in contrast to Iron Age Scandinavia where wealth was supposed to be based on gifts exchanges and plundering¹⁰ (Poulsen & Sindbæk 2011, 1). Fortunately, this concept is being more and more abandoned for more differentiated models (Skre 2011, 192). Possession of the land was important for economic reasons, however, there were also other factors, related to persons social position, that were connected to certain settlements.

Certain part of the land owned by an individual might have possessed the status of *oðal*. It was a part of land that remained in the family for at least five or seven generations (Brink 2002, 103). This piece of land was regarded a token of being a fully free person (Svanberg 2003a, 132; Zachrisson 1994, 220). What constituted *oðal* was also probably the connection of the land to the ancestors whose graves were located on it. If the individual's rights to land were questioned, by Norwegian laws they were supposed to list their ancestors going back to the people buried in the mound located near his farm (Zachrisson 1994, 221). The special dimension of the land plot was further emphasised by restrictions connected to the sale of it, that were written down in Norwegian and Swedish provincial laws (Zachrisson 1994, 220).

¹⁰ Ch. Fabech sees the changes in the cult expressions in the early Vendel Period, connected to abandonment of the offerings at the bogs and mosses as related to change of the economy from based on war and plunder to based on land possession, since the rituals were connected to the places where the chieftains resided (1991, 292). Specialists concentrated on Viking Age move the process to the 10th c., emphasising the importance of resources acquired from plundering expeditions and tributes as an important resource in creating relations based on gift giving economy. However, one can ask, why can the surplus created from agrarian resources, or collected from the dependants form a similar base?

The fact that the land was not only related to economical but also social symbolical status, made the matters of inheritance one of the most serious problems of Viking Age and early Middle Ages. The exact patterns of how inheritance was acquired are unknown for the Viking Age. Legal historians suspect that one child was privileged and received more than the rest of the siblings (Tamm & Vogt 2013, 509). What is known from the rune stones, is that the woman could inherit property both after her husband and children, but probably a male kinsman could also have a claim to inheritance after the deceased (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993, 169). This situation was altered in later medieval provincial laws, which introduced same portions of inheritance for all male heirs, and secured the daughters interests – they could inherit a portion that was an equivalent of a half of the male one (Tamm & Vogt 2013, 509). What probably complicated the matters of claiming the inheritance further was not clearly defined idea of kinship. Land could be easily obtained by claiming and proving the right to it during the legal procedure, but it could be equally easily lost (Hermanson 2011, 68).

The medieval Icelandic sources describe two interesting rituals concerned with receiving the inheritance by the heir. One is consumption of so called “inheritance beer” or “grave beer” – it was probably a ritualised event, combining a feast, commemoration of the deceased’ memory and the formal reception of inheritance with gift exchange and alliance making (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 71–72). In Swedish provincial laws, a similar ritual occurred when the son was allowed to take his dead father’s high seat after drinking a special “inheritance ale” (Zachrisson 1994, 222). During those receptions, according to sagas, second ritualised event took place – the recitation of “inheritance song” (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 71). The exact composition and content of them is unknown, probably they were used to praise the dead. Possibly, they could include elements from other genre of poetry – *attvísi* or *mannfræði*, which were recitations of genealogies (Brink 2002, 103). If this element was present at the funerals, it could be used to legitimise the inheritance claim.

Authors often stress the importance of genealogies for the social identity of an individual, and point towards the fact that when in the saga a new hero is introduced, his ancestors are named (Brink 2005, 72). It should be, however, pointed out that Early Medieval genealogies might have been a different matter than our current idea about them as an “objective” list of past ancestors. To prove this point, a short excursion towards a continental source, contemporary to the Viking Age, is necessary.

In 834, Frankish noble woman Dhuoda wrote a manual for her son, in which she enclosed a chapter about for whom he should pray and in what order. In there, among others, she lists eight names, under the title “genealogia”. There, the people who had transferred land to her son’s father are listed (Geary 1994, 80). This understanding of genealogy is not based on any kind of biological relation, but is driven by the function of displaying the source of wealth in case of legal dispute, and it is constructed and maintained by heirs.

Listing of ancestors can be seen as a means of obtaining legitimisation of land, that in turn was a key feature that identified a person as the fully free individual. When the genealogies are mentioned, they might not be composed out of biological relatives.

1.5.4 Contextualising the model for Scania

The model present in the earlier subchapters is derived from a research conducted mostly on written sources, both the later medieval sagas and rune stones from the Viking Age. It was conducted in cross-regional manner, so its significance for the South

Scandinavian area must be attested. There is no evidence of an *oðal* system for the area, and the difference in economy type as compared to the Icelandic or central Swedish needs to be acknowledged. In attempt to break from the ideas of "Pan-Scandinavian monoculture," a concept cannot be viewed as proven for every region, solely on basis of run stone evidence and written sources. From early Middle Ages up to 1683, Denmark was divided into three legal provinces (Tamm & Vogt 2013, 506) – observing the relation between the community and legal systems, the existence of three different communities governed by different institutions can be observed. The archaeological evidence presented in the beginning of the next chapter also seems to point towards distinct character of the region.

Proves that the ideas that the status of the man was connected to possessing the land can be traced in later medieval institution of *fledføring*. It was described in detail in the laws of Scania and in the laws of Zealand, and was probably introduced to the legal system through them (Vogt 2008, 276). The institution is medieval, as the laws were written down in the beginning of 13th century, probably on demand of the archbishop of Lund in cooperation with local magnates (Tamm & Vogt 2013, 508), but I would argue that it displays some common points with the Viking Age ideas of the free person.

When a person became unable to support themselves through the daily work, due to illness or the old age, it was possible for them to ask other people for support. In exchange, the people who would agree to provide support, would receive all of the "retiring" persons possessions, including land (Vogt 2008, 276). There is an interesting mechanism here at work, that brings to mind similar restrictions connected to the sale of *oðal* land. The retiring person had to ask his kinsmen, if they would receive them first, before they were able to go to other parties. Also becoming a *fledføring* carried with itself a radical drop in person's status, as the guardian was responsible for them legally and received and paid all their fines. The *fledføring* was described with the same sections as slaves in the laws of Jutland (Vogt 2008, 276-278).

In my opinion, the change of person's status is connected to the loss of inherited land, and by that the loss of the thing that legitimises the person as a free member of the society. It might be an indirect trace of similar concept of a person to the proposed ones for the Viking Age in Scania.

2. Analysis

2.1 Regional approach to Scania

A relatively recent development in archaeological studies concerned with Viking Age societies is the emphasis on regional differences in subsistence strategies, expressions of cultural traditions, social structure, participation in trading networks and centre-periphery¹¹ relations (Svanberg 1999, 25). This new approach stands in contrast to earlier research, presenting Scandinavia as internally culturally homogeneous and distinct (Urbańczyk 2009a, 137). Written historical records show multiple names of regions and people inhabiting Scandinavia during the Late Iron Age (Sindbæk 2008, 169). Archaeologists nowadays recognise the fact that people were probably grouped in some form of “settlement districts” separated by woodlands (Fabech 1993, 202; Svanberg 2003a, 152–153) or other natural or cultural boundaries.

For the area of present-day Scania, two possible names for groupings of people have been identified – *Bergio*, probably for the inhabitants of Bjärehalvön, and with less certainty *Lothida* for inhabitants of Luggude, using the names mentioned in Jordanes’ *Getica* (Brink 2008b, 92; Svanberg 1999, 40). The later sources do not elucidate the question of division of this region of Scandinavia to greater extent – in the account of *Travels of Wulfstan*, that took place around the end of 9th century, region named Sconeg is mentioned as belonging to *Denemearcan*¹² (Fabech 1993, 203; Sindbæk 2008, 170; Svanberg 1999, 39). In the description of Scania from Adam’s of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* from the second part of the 11th c., the region is described as not divided, but in the work by Saxo, in the context of the Scanian rebellions from around 1180–1182, North and South Scanians are mentioned (Svanberg 1999, 40).

The historical record does not emphasise regional differences that are visible when more nuanced methods are employed. Ch. Fabech, using the rich source material, built up by many generations of researchers working with geography, production and architecture of Scania, combined it with the information about the diverse natural landscape in south Scandinavia and correlated with phosphate mapping, place name data, sites of medieval churches and gold finds, managed to highlight places in which Late Iron Age settlements could be located (1993, 210–220).

¹¹ The terms centre and periphery can be defined in many ways, and are tied to many questions. It can be used in analysis of power relations, economy and cultural influence (Andersson 2009, 15). Good presentation of problems and discussions in relation to understanding those terms was presented in article *Historisk arkeologi och globalisering* by Hans Andersson (2009). In most general understanding a centre would be a place from where something originates, that influences the peripheries originates from, or a place to which “resources” from peripheries are transferred to create a new quality or phenomena. However, there is always a necessity for clear definition of those terms if they are going to be used extensively.

¹² This information is discussed extensively as a proof of Scania being a part of Danish Kingdom already in the 9th c., however, there is a significant discussion about the meaning of the suffix *marc*, that can signify a border zone (Svanberg 1999, 40). In that case Scania would belong to the Danish border area.

In her opinion, settlement was mostly grouped on the plain areas of Scania, in the south-west and east, near the present-day Kristianstad. Those clusters were separated by an extensive area that was less densely populated, but old place names were also recorded along the Helgå, on the border of Scania and Småland, and around the Finjasjö (Fabech 1993, 213–216). The difference can probably be further traced by analysing the names of hundreds – eastern hundreds: Göinge, Villands, Gärds and Albo are not called after a settlement or a Ting place, and are not called as such in the historical sources from the 11th and 12th c. This can indicate that these areas names were derived from the old regional small countries names, in opposition to the names in South-western Scania, which can indicate an administrative division that took place earlier and was more organised (Fabech 1993, 222). According to Fabech, two main regions could be differentiated, for the Late Iron Age Scania, one on the plains around Kristianstad, settlement with long continuity located at Vå, and another on the plains of south-west, with similarly long-lasting settlement at Uppåkra. Smaller units could be located in the areas in between, for example between Ringsjön and Finjasjön (Fabech 1993, 222).

K. Schmidt-Sabo supports the division presented in Fabech's article, expanding her ideas from the hypothesis that Scania, during the 8th and 9th century, was a border area for the Danish interest, and the consolidation of power there did not take place up till the end of the 10th c. (Fabech 1993, 235, Schmidt-Sabo 1997, 675). She sees the pre-state society as based mainly on kin relations, and believes that this kind of society cannot co-exists with society based on royal power and state. The state, to neutralise the influence of the chieftains in the older centres, had to establish its own. In the the area of eastern Denmark, that includes Scania, the royal power used *Kongeleiv* – kings residence and administrative centres (Schmidt-Sabo 1997, 678). This process can be traced, as there is evidence that the lands near Sösdala became kings property and royal manors were established at Ravlunda and in Vå (Fabech 1993, 234). Possibly, the placement of the city of Lund near the older centre at Uppåkra can be seen as a similar tactics, to gain control over the South-western Scania (Svanberg 1999, 112). Following this line of thought – the places of kings activity could be seen as the places of more dense settlement, and in fact the map of location of the royal manors seems to correspond to the most densely populated areas (Schmidt-Sabo 1997, 679).

Different approach to the question of division of Scania was introduced by F. Svanberg, who argues for a more complex picture. By investigating the Viking Age burial traditions, he identified that in the south-east mainly cremation was practised, in the south-west – mostly inhumations, as well as in the North-West. Central part of Scania is problematic, since almost no burials have been identified there¹³ (Svanberg 1999, 29–32). To Svanberg, further differences could be observed if the sources of "imports"¹⁴ to different parts of Scania are analysed. In his opinion, with exclusion of sites of Åhus and Osby from eastern

¹³ Two sites are described in section *Interior of North Scania*, these are burial grounds at Vätteryd and Vanneröd. On both mainly cremation was practised and stone settings of different shapes were built. The dead were most often buried in cremation pits in the stone settings. A continuation of using the monuments and sites through the Late Iron Age was discovered (Svanberg 2003b, 111–114).

¹⁴ The way in which imports are treated as traces of contact can be seen as more controversial, as the trading sites become excluded and the focus is placed on rather durable and tangible artefacts, mainly made out of metal, with complete exclusion of glass shards or pottery. The interpretation of the finds from the area of the South-western Scania as the spoils from rides also calls for revision, as the evidence from earlier contacts with the western Europe and the British Isles should be brought to light. Their "elite" character also cannot be perceived as self-explanatory

Scania, the western, Frankish and insular imports from before the year 1000, such as fittings, a brooch and a clasp knife, concentrate in the western Scania. Their character, according to him, can point to the participation of the West Scanian elites in the first wave of Viking raids against the western Europe (Svanberg 1999, 34–36). The fact that only a very small number of oval, round and equal-armed brooches was found in the West Scania can indicate also that the fashion of the female dress was more based on continental and Byzantine patterns (Svanberg 1999, 36; 2003b, 97). Eastern part, according to Svanberg, displays more ties with the central Sweden and the East in general, by the occurrence of rune stones near Elleköpinge and Simirs that display similarity to central Swedish material. Additionally, imported oriental belt fittings found in Fjälkinge and a part of a bowl found in Valleberga and Baltic pins and combed-shaped pendants known from the south-east of Scania support the ideas of more eastern oriented connections of that area (Svanberg 1999, 38).

Svanberg's approach focusing on the burial customs, in the case of South-western Scania supports the earlier divisions, marking it even more as a distinct region, with strong ties to the area of Zealand (Svanberg 1999, 40).

An important recognition of the works concerned with more regional approach to studies of Late Iron Age in Scandinavia is the observation of differences among the settlement districts. The fact that people occupied different landscapes led to different economics, building techniques and life styles (Fabech 1993, 202). To put it briefly, it led to different practice, that had to lead to different material culture uncovered in the archaeological record. One of the most important questions is how those differences were perceived by the neighbouring populations. Even if the differences in material culture are viewed as a product of natural environment, not a choice involved in creation of identity, they can be perceived as possessing enough agency to contribute to creation of one (Sindbæk 2008, 173). If identity has to be understood as formed on basics of drawing on similarities and differences among individuals and groups then, in fact, the regional difference, based on different strategies towards use of landscape can lead to creation of social categories.

Another question is, however, whether groups, formed by this recognition of difference, should be perceived as different tribes. Ethnicity is nowadays viewed as situational and fluent, as the boundaries between different people are recognised through internal and external identification (Sindbæk 2008, 172; Svanberg 2003a, 155). In that case, the context in which people are included or excluded becomes important, since the ethnic identity is not fixed. The settlement districts probably could form separate political units at different times, as people forming them could poses many identities and depending on the situation they could make a decision to display some of them.

Concerning the area of Viking Age Denmark, an interesting study conducted by S. Sindbæk on materials excavated from settlements demonstrated that people were using material culture that was characteristic of very small community groups, corresponding to the districts of legal assemblies (2008, 199). This probably partially reflects the fact that these were the most accessible items, but it also points to the importance of local identities, as it can be clearly seen that there is no "cultural trait" that would be common for the whole area of the later kingdom of Denmark (Sindbæk 2008, 200).

2.1.1 Rural cemeteries in South-western Scania

South-western Scania of the Viking Age can be considered a distinct settlement district. It was separated by the sea from the territories of Zealand, and by dense woodlands

in the east from the other settlement district, the north and the south boundary of the area is not as clearly defined (Svanberg 2003a, 165). This thesis is concerned with graves displaying traces of ritualised practice from sites located in this area. The sites where such burials were located are Ljungbacka¹⁵, Önsvala, Råga Hörstad, Norrvidinge, Stävie and Trelleborg¹⁶ (fig.1) which display many similarities and thus, in my opinion, can be treated as sites of similar type.

2.1.2 Location of the sites in the Landscape

Landscape must be considered a cultural, not natural phenomenon (Jennbert 2004, 196). Without people, the natural environment does not become loaded with meanings and qualities¹⁷. Cemeteries must be studied in relation to landscape, meant both as “natural” and “man-made” features, to understand their cosmological¹⁸ and social role in past societies and theorise on how the control of them could have been used in negotiating power (Williams 2002, 346).

Most of the sites were located on an elevated area, a ridge in case of Önsvala (Larsson, 1981, 129) or Trelleborg (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 1), and a sandy plateau in case of Stävie (Nagmér 1979, 1). Situation was less clear at Råga Hörstad or Norrvidinge, but from the maps it is visible that the cemeteries were placed at the edges of the moraine. Five of the sites were discovered because of the gravel extraction, what can point to similar geological conditions. The site of Ljungbacka is also located on the moraine that gives it a similar elevated position in relation to the surrounding landscape.

Near the site of Norrvidinge, Stävie and Råga Hörstad watercourses, still visible today, can be located. Near Norrvidinge or Råga Hörstad only small streams are now present, similarly a small watercourse runs to the east of the ridge on which the Önsvala burial ground is located. Cemetery at Stävie is located near Kävlingeå, the largest river in western Scania.

All the cemeteries are located in the areas where earlier prehistoric activities took place, in most cases the remains of Bronze Age and Neolithic settlements were found at the sites. It might be a coincidence caused by the fact that the elevated position could protect the settlement from flooding, while the nearby watercourse could provide it with fresh water. Other possibility would be a deliberate choice of place of earlier human activity. Although there is only a limited possibility to reconstruct the past landscapes, we can assume that the traces of past activities were more visible than now. Different cultures can have different

¹⁵ The site is named Lockarp, according to RAÄ register, and this name is also used in F. Svanberg's publications. I've chosen to follow the site name used by Samuelson in his thesis about the cemetery, from which I obtained most of the information about the site.

¹⁶ The cemetery described in this thesis is also known as Trelleborg Kv.Verkstad or Vannahög

¹⁷ This statement can be criticised on grounds of symmetrical approach in archaeology, opting for non-radical division between human and non-human agents (Witmore 2007, 546–547). I must agree with large part of the ideological developments connected with the emergence of symmetrical archaeology. The binary divisions of mind and matter, as well as of nature and culture are a modern construct. I am, however, concerned with possibility of transgressing our own humanness in research, and doubtful when it comes to possibilities in achieving a non-humanocentric perspective. Probably, it will always be a more or less aware projection of the anthropocentric approach.

¹⁸ The word here is used in a sense of a spatial position and properties of a place in an imagined world structure, consisting of several different worlds for gods and places related to afterlife etc.

approach to ruins (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 220–221), the places could have been avoided, utilised in a practical manner or could have changed the purpose to serve other functions. Older monuments can often be recognised as creation of non-human beings or long gone past races (Whitley 2001, 124). At Norrvindinge and Ljungbacka the earlier monuments could be the reason of choosing a place for a burial ground. At both of the sites earlier burials were discovered, and at Ljungbacka the Bronze Age burial mound formed a focal point of a cemetery (Samuelsson 1998, 6).

All the sites are also located in the vicinity of settlement remains that could have been used contemporary with them. However, pinpointing exact villages that have utilised the cemeteries might be difficult, as it is believed that villages moved through the whole Late Iron Age (Callmer 1991, 344). At Stävie (fig.2) settlement, remains consisting of a pit house¹⁹ dating back to the Viking Age, with remains of a longhouse that could not be exactly dated have been found (Svanberg & Södeberg 2000, 340). In the same parish, two hoards consisting mostly of hack-silver and Arabic coins that can be dated for the 10 c. have been recovered (Strömberg 1961b, 62; Svanberg & Södeberg 2000, 340–341). Further remains of settlements are known just across the river from the cemetery area at Hög (Nagmér 1979, 94), consisting mostly of pit houses (Svanberg & Södeberg 2000, 54). The site is also located less than 2 km away from settlements at Löddeköppinge, that can be seen as an elite settlement during the time period 700-950, and it is near Borgeby, where not only traces of Viking Age settlements were located, but also a ringfort was built in the end of the 10th c (Svanberg & Södeberg 2000, 315).

The cemetery at Trelleborg (fig.3) is located between a settlement with probable connotations to elite at Västervång and a trading place located at the coast, that was used through out the Vendel Period up till half of the 10th c. (Carlie 2008, 116).

Cemetery at Ljungbacka (fig.4) is surrounded by a number of settlements, that could have been used through the long chronology of the cemetery. This includes two settlements discovered at Fosie IV, from which one is around 200 m from the site and another around 1 km from it. There is also the third settlement in the vicinity (around 600 m from the site) that is dated to the beginnings of the 11th c. (Samuelsson 2001, 103). Two settlements are known from area of Lockarp, that also might have utilised the cemetery, and are tied by A. Carlie to lower-classes of nobility on the basis of a building type. One is called “Lockarp village site” and second “Lockarp 7A” and were occupied from the second half of 8th c. to the 10th c. (Carlie 2008, 124).

At Önsvala (fig.5) some traces, of pit houses could be dated to the Viking Age, but their relation to the cemetery part of the site is uncertain, as excavators concentrated on the graves (Larsson 1981, 130). The site is located around 5 km to the South from important elite settlement at Uppåkra.

At Råga Hörstad (fig.6) settlement, traces that can be dated to the Iron Age were discovered on the burial ground (Strömberg 1968, 60). Traces of possible Viking Age settlement were also discovered under the modern village, couple of hundred meters to the East from the cemetery, mainly pit houses were located (Strömberg 1968, 63).

Norrvindinge was never published, and as such was never contextualised on a background of neighbouring settlements. FMIS list number of settlement sites in vicinity,

¹⁹ Before the employment of more refined excavation techniques during 70's in Denmark in connection to excavation of Jutlandic Viking Age villages, the longhouses were under-represented in the material. The application of the methodology developed on Jutland reached Scanian archaeologist at the end of seventies (Svanberg & Södeberg 2000, 54). Reports from before that time, mentioning mostly pit houses or only pit houses as sole type of the building in a settlement should be treated with caution.

including the area of the cemetery, but none of them displayed any traces of Viking Age settlement (<http://www.fmis.raa.se/cocoon/fornsok/search.html> accessed 21.04.2014). In the parish, a golden solidus from the second half of the 5th c. was found (Strömberg 1961b, 51). An important settlement, dated mostly to the Vendel Period, is located at Västra Karaby, around 10 km from the site (Svanberg & Södeberg 2000, 23) where some evidence of bronze casting from the 8th c. has been found in a similar type as produced at contemporary settlement at Uppåkra. Fact that the site might have been of high status is further indicated by the find of a glass beaker and sword pommel (Helgesson 2003, 326–327).

Further important connection, although hard to trace in Scandinavia, is the connection between the cemeteries and routes (Thäte 2011, 113). At Ljungbacka (fig. 12), according to the excavator, route from the area of Uppåkra to Trelleborg is crossing through the burial ground (Samuelson 2001, 90). Possibly also the burial ground at Trelleborg should be viewed in connection with that route, but the site was not completely excavated. If the planigraphy of the site at Norrvidinge can be trusted, it is possible that the empty area between graves, that is narrow and linear, might be indicative of some sort of a path.

2.1.3 Spatial arrangements of the cemeteries

Most of the cemeteries seem to display similar features in regard to burial customs. Inhumation is the only registered rite at Önsvala (fig.7), where 26 inhumation graves were discovered (Larsson 1981, 130), Stävie (fig.8), where 69 inhumations were discovered (Nagmér 1979, 5) . At Trelleborg (fig. 9) where 40 burials were documented (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 30) and one possible cremation burial (Hanson 1993, 4). One possible cremation grave and 34 inhumations are known at Råga Hörstad (fig. 10) (Strömberg 1968, 3) and another single cremation is known at Norrvidinge (fig. 11) (Tilander²⁰ 1966) in addition to over 70 inhumations (Svanberg 2003b, 284). These low cremation numbers stand in strong contrast with discoveries at Ljungbacka (fig. 12), where 160 simple cremation graves were documented in addition to 31 inhumations (Samuelsson 1998, 8).

The South-western Scanian Viking Age burial customs are often described as dominated by inhumation (Svanberg 2003a, 165–167). It is a notion that reflects the present state of research, however, probably cremation was much more widespread during the Late Iron Age in the area. The reason for the under-representation of the cremation burials is the fact that they are hard to date by using archaeological methods, since they are almost always lacking in datable grave goods (Svanberg 2003b,). Due to the fact that analysis and description of cremation graves would require additional specialistic studies, they will be only touched briefly in this thesis. What is important is that some of the preconceptions about them will be questioned.

The burials from Ljungbacka, where some of the cremations must belong to Viking Age because of their stratigraphical position over the inhumation burials or small fragments of pottery dating back to the Viking Age found (Samuelsson 1998, 36; Svanberg 2003b), two types characterised by Strömberg are represented, a *Brandgrube* (“cremation pit”) and *Herdgrab* (“a hearth grave”). The former is a pit, that could have been dug also in a layer of pyre remains, filled with cremation products, burial goods and stones, the latter – a feature similar to a hearth, but in between the stones human remains, cremation products and parts

²⁰ Unpublished report, stored in LUHM archives – the grave was dated to the Viking Age. It was a cremation layer. In the layer, a spindle whorl and a whetstone were found. It was probably a grave under low burial mound.

of burial goods can be found (Strömberg 1961, 50). In some of the burials from Ljungbacka, due to the composition of the remains in the feature and discolourations of the soil around them, use of organic containers was postulated (Samuelsson 1998, 29). The fact that there are no external features connected to these burials recorded can lead to a very likely conclusion that they were destroyed during the unsupervised topsoil removal that took place at all of the described sites, except Ljungbacka (Svanberg 2003b, 89). Evidence from Zealand, frequently mentioned as similar to western Scania point to more complex relation between inhumation and cremation cemeteries, for example from Rytterkær 12 pits filled with cremation material were found, including bone one (Jønsson 1992, 38), similar finds are known from Lejre (Wulf Andersen 1995) and pit with burned bones was discovered at Trekroner Grydehøj; and at Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakke, not only a cremation grave was found, but also 36 other features had a mixing of a post-cremation material (Ulriksen 2011, 164–181).

The problematic notion is the question if the cremation burials should be viewed as graves in South-western Scania. The weight of the burned bones retrieved from cremation pits at Ljungbacka varies from 0,1 g to 53,6 g (Samuelsson 1998, 32). C. Arcini, in relation to earlier Iron Age sites, produced a hypothesis that features that cremation related features in which small amount of bone is found might be in fact a site of a pyre, not a grave (2005, 64). Cremated bone is also often discovered outside “burial” context in Scandinavia (Back Danielson 2007, 252; Goldhahn & Oestigaard 2008, 232). The material recovered from majority of the cremation burials from South-western Scania can be characterised as a “token deposit”. It can be defined as a deposit that includes less than 100g of burned human bone, that is less than 6% of the amount that would consist the whole individual. In case of such small amounts, archaeologist should be open to regard this remains as forming a feature that would not qualify as a “grave” in a modern understanding of the term, but might be trace of other rituals connected to funerals (McKinley 2013, 154). Whatever was the meaning of the deposition of cremated remains in the ground, however, it is important to recognise it as a trace that cremation was practised side by side with inhumation during the Viking Age in Scania, to an unknown yet extend, due to the quality of the past research.

The fact that the cremation graves could have been destroyed, brings the planigraphy of the burial grounds into question. The dominating idea about the spatial division of the Viking Age cemeteries in South-western Scania is that the graves form distinct clusters (Svanberg 2003b). This can be observed at relatively carefully excavated burial ground at Ljungbacka (fig. 12), where five grave groups could be observed (Samuelsson 2001, 100–101). They are interpreted as reflecting the chronological development of the cemetery and the divisions into different villages burying their death in separate clusters. The division of graves was also proposed for the burial ground at Råga Hörstad (Kleiminger 1993, 137), on the basis of the burial goods discovered in burials. A group of better-equipped burials seemed to be concentrated in the middle part of the cemetery, around the grave no. 6, interpreted as weapon grave, as opposed to a group of graves to the north where mainly knives and whetstones, interpreted by Kleiminger as “daily objects,” were found (Kleiminger 1993, 138).

I do not believe that the cemetery can be divided according to categories of burial equipment²¹, but there seem to be a pattern in the spatial location of the graves. Possibly, the

²¹ The inclusion or exclusion of burial goods is related to conscious choice of the mourners and is not related to the deceased social identity (Ekengren 2013, 182). The items might reflect spiritual concerns or be means or traces of completing certain ritual stages. Possibly, people with similar grave goods underwent similar rites and this, not the status of the people buried, might have been the reason to group the burials.

central group and the northern group could be viewed as separate clusters, however exact boundaries are hard to draw. The fact that in the northern group graves intersect might point towards conclusion that the location of the burial was a serious concern for participants of the funerals. However, the evidence about the spatial arrangements of the graves at Råga Hörstad (fig. 10) should be considered as fragmentary in light of the use of the machine topsoil removal that have destroyed unknown number of cremation burials.

The division of burials into clusters was also proposed for Stävie (fig. 8), where four of five groups could be observed (Kleiminger 1993, 140). The division seems to fit well with the spatial location of the known burials, but again the question about the representativeness of preserved traces must be raised, judging from the exceptionally high number of inhumation burials damaged during the unsupervised machine topsoil removal. Also, the grave clusters seem to be located in relatively large distance from each other.

F. Svanberg proposed a group division for the unpublished cemetery at Norrvidinge (fig. 11), including all three traces of burial mounds as one cluster (Svanberg 2003b, 91). In my opinion, lines should be drawn differently. The traces of burial mounds should be seen as focal points of separate grave groups – what can be seen at the intersection burials around the grave 18, that include relatively rich burial equipment comparing to other burials from South-western Scania. Possibly the burials around the mound immediately to the south of it should be counted in the group. The burials even more to the South seem to concentrate on the third burial mound. To the East, however, this can be taken as a speculation, the third group of burials could be seen, in the area unfortunately damaged by gravel extraction. As a separate part of cemetery, the area to the north-west could possibly be described, if the linear break in the disposition of burials could be seen as traces of a road or a path.

At Trelleborg (fig. 10), due to the fact that cemetery is not fully excavated and placed in area that is currently a city, the conditions prevent from dividing the area in grave clusters. Excavators point to the division along the lines of age – individuals of all ages would be buried in the Western part of the cemetery and only adults in the Eastern one (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 4). From the available evidence it seems that the burial mounds formed focal points of other graves, but it is hard to prove without a good relative chronology of burials.

Further problem, connected to the excavation techniques employed during the 60's and 70's, but also to agricultural character of western Scania, is the general lack of information about the external features of the burials. Traces of a probable Roman Iron Age burial mound were observed during the excavations at Önsvala (Larsson 1981a). Traces of probable edge ditches after the burial mounds were visible at Trelleborg (five) and at Norrvidinge (three). From fills of some inhumation burials at Önsvala, Råga Hörstad, Trelleborg and Ljungbacka large stones have been retrieved that originally might have been positioned on the ground surface. Excavators generally expressed the belief that because the graves seldom intersect each other, they had to be somehow externally marked (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 6). However, careful examination of the burial grounds shows that grave intersection or overlays were not something unusual. Paradoxically, this can also point towards probability of external marking of burials, if intersections are treated as a deliberate practice. The location of the older grave had to be known by the people who decided to dig a pit to bury another person in the same grave, and it is probably caused not by the lack of space for the newer burial (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 7).

2.1.4 Internal composition of the burials

All of the cemeteries display similar variation when it comes to the internal composition of the inhumation burials. Most of the pits are of oval or rectangular shape, the usual dimension is roughly 2 x 1 m. Both coffined burials and inhumations without a container are frequent. The use of coffins was recorded for all parts of the Late Iron Age. Rectangular, log coffins and riveted coffins were encountered. At the site in Trelleborg, an individual was even buried in a trapezoid coffin. In Kleiminger's and Strömberg's opinion, an individual from the grave 6 (appendix, fig. 33) from Råga Hörstad could have been buried in a chamber grave (Kleiminger 1993, 138; Strömberg 1968, 30). In Kleiminger's opinion, possibly at Stävie in the grave A40 (Nagmér 1979, 32) a person was buried in a wagon case in a chamber (1994, 140), unfortunately the burial was severely damaged during the topsoil removal. Peculiar structure was found in the burial A53 from Stävie. The wooden walls and floor were visible in the profile, and it is most likely a candidate to be a chamber grave. A chamber grave is also mentioned in short description of excavations at Norrvidinge. From Ljungbacka, the G18 burial (appendix, fig. 11) was mentioned by Samuelsson as a possible chamber grave, as the pit for the burial was exceptionally large comparing to the rest of the cemetery (1998, 11). Unfortunately, no traces of wooden constructions were preserved in the grave. It is, however, important to notice, even in light of very inconclusive excavation results, that on three cemeteries there are graves that could display status difference among the buried population.

Further signs of the elite presence at the Scanian rural cemeteries might be the remains of wagon case burials. One of them, the burial 24 (appendix, fig. 28) was found at Önsvala (Larsson 1981) another is known from Norrvidinge, as the burial 60 (Svanberg 2003b, 286), also from Stävie, numbered A35 (Nagmér 1979, 30). There is the second burial that might have been made in a wagon case from this site – A40, however, its content proves it rather unlikely. From Råga Hörstad, there is a burial no. 15 in "riveted coffin" that might be also a burial in the wagon body, however, the outline of the wooden structure is only 65 cm wide, what would make it an extremely narrow case²² (Strömberg 1968, 18).

The graves from the described cemeteries that might be dated to the Viking Age generally confront F. Svanberg's observations about the low quantity of burial goods in the inhumations in South-western Scania (2003b, 86). This situation creates a problem with chronology of the graves, and for this reason many burials included in this study have an uncertain dating, that might reflect the whole Late Iron Age. There is, however, a group of burials in which larger amounts of equipment is found, that can be dated after the middle of the 10th c. Additionally, wealthy female burials were found at the cemetery in Önsvala, they can be dated to the Migration Period and early Vendel Period (Larsson 1981a).

²² Similar interpretation was proposed for grave BE from Bogøvej (Grøn et al. 1994, 35–36).

2.1.5 Chronology and demography

The cemeteries display long chronology. Burials at Önsvala took place from the late Roman Iron Age to around the beginning of the 11th c. Råga Hörstad was used from the Vendel Period to at least the 10th c. (Svanberg 2003b, 282). Site at Norrvinge was used until the beginning of 11th c., probably as well as Stävie, that was used for burials already in the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period²³. From Ljungbacka some of the cremation graves date to the Vendel Period (but for the single Bronze Age cremation) and the latest datable burial goods indicate that the site was in use at least till the end of the 10th c. (Samuelsson 2001, 100). From the site at Trelleborg, some graves are also dated to Vendel Period, on a basis of discovered artefacts (Svanberg 2003b, 293). The C 14 dating of skeletons discovered indicates that the majority was buried during the 10th c. (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 3) (Tab. 1). This thesis is concerned with burials that are from or could be dated to the Viking Age. The understanding of the beginning of the period in question is as blurry as the criteria of possible Viking Age burial. Generally speaking any arbitrary date from around the half of the 8th c. could be used, since the majority of the burials display striking similarities, at least from the Vendel Period onwards. It seems that attack on Lindisfarne in 793 (Roesdahl 2000) failed to be an event as crucial in the life of the local population as we used to imagine²⁴.

The division of Iron Age into Vendel Period or Viking Age is simply not applicable to the data from majority of the graves, and this kind of evidence should be studied in a longer perspective. The divisions result from the fact that the studies were concerned mostly with burials that easily could be classified as “elite,” on which events that could be classified as “political” had greater toll. I have to, however, stress that I do not think that there are no burials of the local elite members at the described sites. The burial customs during Late Iron Age could have displayed less concern with deposition of items usually associated with them in graves in the region. Seemingly uniform burial ritual could be used to mask real social inequalities (Fahlander 2008, 31). Unfortunately, limited time frames for the assignment forced me to impose the Viking Age as an arbitrary boundary. It is quite probable that most of described practices could be traced as well in the periods before the Viking Age. Fortunately, the end of use of the cemeteries coincides with the arbitrary boundary for the end of the Viking Age, around the half of the 11th c. It is also the time of intensified political change in the area, which is visible in the material, and in fact is, as it will be argued in the conclusion of the chapter, was a very probable reason for the abandonment of sites.

A common opinion is that the majority of the population was subject to burial during the Viking Age (Jennbert 2004, 188). The Scanian burial grounds clearly do not conform to it, or at least seem not to on the basis of the amount of discovered burials. Western Scania is believed to be one of the most densely populated regions during the Viking Age (Samuelsson 2001, 105; Svanberg & Söderberg 2000, 14–15). The cemeteries in southern Scandinavia are generally believed to serve for burial of inhabitants of several villages (Svanberg 2003a, 148).

²³ No burials has been dated to Vendel Period yet, but they might be present in the whole group of hard to date burials, that can be only generally dated to Late Iron Age.

²⁴ Archaeological material surely conforms to Ch. Fabech opinion that if the Viking Age was described only through it, with omission of narration of the historical sources, it would appear as more peaceful period than Roman Iron Age or Migration Period (1991, 283). In my opinion, the fact that the Viking Age exists as a separate period is, in fact, caused in large extend by the overemphasis on historical narration and its relevance for entire Late Iron Age population.

However, it is possible to discuss the mortality rates or the sizes of the household, or the village – the example of 26 burials during around 700 years of the time the site at Önsvala functioned hardly support the idea that the site was used to bury the majority of the local population²⁵.

The younger part of population – children and adolescents, are under-represented. At Råga Hörstad only 7 burials of individuals belonging probably to those age groups have been discovered, which is 20% of all burials (Klienminger 1994, 137), at Trelleborg around 25% of burials belonged to the same age group (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 3); these numbers are, however, quite unusual. The majority of the remains that were subject to age estimation belonged to adults. This does not correspond to high infant and subadult mortality rate, assumed in Late Iron Age societies (Maldonado 2013, 9).

The question of who was buried at the sites is problematic. The ritual is very consistent²⁶ throughout the centuries of sites use, as opposed, to for example, cemeteries related to trading places such as Birka, Kaupang or Hedeby, which display a wider variation, probably related to multi-ethnic population that composed the coastal trading community. I agree with J.Callmer's opinion that this community should be viewed as different from populations occupied mostly with agriculture (Callmer 2001, 155). Arcini & Jacobssen do not associate the cemetery at Trelleborg with the inhabitants of coastal settlement, because of its demographic profile, that included a large number of children, women and people over 50 years old (2008, 6). In their opinion, the coastal settlements should have had more male burials and be more exclusive when it comes to age groups. This opinion should be viewed as incorrect, as evidence point now to more differentiated view on population of coastal trading sites, were division of labour can indicate substantial population of women present²⁷ (Callmer 2001, 26).

Missing from the cemeteries, at least from the possible Viking Age graves, are the ornaments adorned with any of the “animal styles”. Objects ornamented in those styles are perceived as expression of distinct material culture and ideology of the elites (Hedager 2004, 220). In Hedager's opinion, they could also be associated with military brotherhoods that existed outside the laws of community, distincting themselves by special cloths and equipment (2004, 246).

The very undifferentiated grave goods can lure researchers into thinking that the population buried consisted of people of one status. Similar conclusions dominate in the debate about the Anglo-Saxon field cemeteries, which, due to relatively scarce burial goods discovered in graves are interpreted as serving small rural populations (Astill 2011, 225). In my opinion, it is impossible to ascribe status to most of the burials, but the fact that more differentiated burial goods appear during the Migration Period and later in the 10th c. should

²⁵ There is, of course, a possibility that the actual site was much larger, as it was damaged by gravel extraction, and the machine opening of the area was done in a very crude way.

²⁶ The exception could be made for the site at Ljungbacka, where some variation was observed in the form of the cremation burials. Most of the burials could be qualified as cremation pits, but some cremation pits with organic urns, some pits with just burned bones w only, without the pyre material and some hearth graves were recorded (Samuelsson 1998, 28–29). This division can be related to chronology or be caused by the fact that some of the features might not be actual burials.

²⁷ The idea that the trade was exclusively male activity could be also challenged on the basis of A. Stalberg's research on finds of weights and balances in Viking Age graves in Sweden, Russia and Norway. Pointing to a double standard of interpreting the artefacts, she concludes that whole families could be involved in activities connected to exchange (Stalberg 2001, 75).

point to the conclusion that elite graves were present at the sites. If this presence was continuous or is related to overall political situation is another question that requires further research.

Analysing the burial in early Middle Ages in Scotland A. Maldonado views some of them as public genealogical statements, and even though he views grave clusters as “family” plots, the restricted demographics forces him to conclude that only certain individuals were buried there (2013, 21–23). Similar situation seems to be possible on Scanian rural cemeteries. In my opinion the sites were used to bury only a selected part of the population²⁸. To discuss the reasons for this behaviour is beyond possibilities of current research, as reasons would probably vary through the long time of site usage. The cemeteries are formed gradually and can reflect different concepts through different time (Fahlander 2008, 31). It is important to stress the intentionality of the choice of which individual to bury, and also the choice of place in which the ceremony took place. The uniformity of practice or lack of “elite”-related burials should not be perceived as reflection of “life” identities, it is rather a reflection of what identity was created for the society of the dead.

2.1.6 Cemetery as arena of social interaction

The funerals have to be seen as ceremonies through which new social order is created (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 37–38). This statement is easy to imagine for an archaeologist on the level of the top social strata, when events sanctioning power relations and control over territories and countries, needs to take place, but it is true for any member of the community. H. Williams, writing about Migration Period cemeteries from eastern England, characterised Anglo-Saxon society during 5th to 6th c. as based on face-to-face relations, kin groups and loyal retainers (2001, 341). This description fits well to the concepts of power in Late Iron Age Scandinavia, where power was not exercised over territories but over people (Svanberg 1998, 118) and was based on personal social relations (Poulsen & Sindbæk 2011, 13; Varenus 1998, 33; Vogt 2010, 12). The personal character of the relation required restructuring after the death of one of the sides. Public gatherings were perfect settings to create new alliances (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 29), that could be built on ritual performances stressing the relation to the deceased.

The idea that the law and religion were probably parts of one concept in Old Norse societies is underlined by many scholars (Andrén et al. 2006, 12; Brink 2004, 308; Schjødt 2009.). The legal proceeding must be understood as a public ritualised event, in fact very similar to funeral. It is possible that some of the performances should be viewed as acts both legal and religious in nature. The connection between a funerary activity and legal activity had been proven for central Swedish ting sites, often located near the cemeteries, and is now investigated in relation to sites from Anglo-Saxon England (Semple & Sanmark 2013, 532). Presumably, traces of judicial activity are known from Early Medieval British cemeteries (Maldonado 2013, 24). This can point to inclusion of the dead member of society into the process of decision making (Semple & Sanmark 2013, 533). The information about the ting sites is usually lacking from description of Viking Age Scania, however, at Önsvala village a later medieval hundred court site and an execution place were located up till the end of the 17th c. (Larsson 1981, 190).

²⁸ Or a small part of the population was subject to the inhumation rite, which left the discovered traces. The extent of cremation rituals practised at the sites will always remain unknown.

The reconstruction of society encapsulated also the matters of possessions of the dead person. The question of inheritance of the land, as presented in previous chapter, seemed to be one of the main problems of Viking Age societies. The bilateral kinship system that, in addition, was mainly based on performances and social action, had to create a tension and uncertainty in cases when the land, one of the most valuable resources in medieval Europe, was passing from hands of the dead to the hand of the heirs. In Norway and central Sweden, the graves have been used to legitimise the shifts of land possession (Zachrisson 1994, 220) and the possession of *ođal* was something that characterised a person as a free member of the society. The same concept is harder to demonstrate in regard to southern Scandinavia. It is, in my opinion, very likely that the ritualised performances during the funerals provided both “supernatural” and social legitimation for shifts of land possession.

Since the land could be viewed as a token of being a member of a community, funerals should be viewed as rituals in which societies were constructed. Further strengthening of the sense of being a group would be employment of group-restricted performances. The differentiation of the burial ritual in southern Scandinavia (Svanberg 2003b) can provide a backdrop on which dividing lines the “ethnic” discourse could draw, depending on the political situation in region.

The ritualised action taking place at the funerals was employed to create a social memory and by the use of material culture in attempt to “fix” the fluent ever-changing social identities (Graham 2009, 52–54). The monuments can be seen as anchors through which wider concepts were attached to the landscape, and cemeteries as public arenas on which performances creating individuals and communities take place.

The landscape location of the cemeteries on the elevated areas signifies the importance of visibility of sites (Svanberg 2003a, 148; Thäte 2011, 108). The fact that the cemeteries had been also located near the ancient roads and watercourses (Thäte 2011, 108) can further point to their function as a medium of communication through monument display (Graham 2009, 52; Härke 2002, 12). The location in settled areas of the landscape further stresses the cemeteries importance as places where, possibly, the living could contact the supernatural and use their power to legitimise their actions (Maldonado 2013, 8). Maldonado, discussing similarly spatially located Scottish Early Medieval cemeteries, points to their integration with everyday activities and the importance of site visibility, since they were placed in nodal points of the landscape (2013, 24). Thäte, discussing the places where cemeteries are located, underlines their cosmological dimension as liminal places (2011, 111–18) – in my opinion, this approach artificially disconnects the cemeteries from the daily practice of communities. The evidence from South-western Scania clearly proves that the “liminal” areas are in fact located next to a settlement, and excavations from other parts of Scandinavia indicate that boundary between the settlement and burial context could have been fluent (Larsson 2005, 100). The boundary between the worlds was non-existent as the dead and the living, in fact, formed one society, in which one upheld the identities of the others in the ongoing process of society construction.

2.1.7 Royal control and the creation of Society – the view from the cemetery

In the paper about social and power relations in the Migration Period and Vendel Period Ch. Fabech has pointed to connection between the chieftain farm and the cult places, showing how they were used to influence the relation between the leader and the rest of

society (1991, 298–300). Unfortunately, in her work she did not include burial grounds. However, if the central places can be defined as places where authority and power is reproduced (Williams 2001, 342), then, cemeteries should be viewed as their important element. Recent developments tend to move away from ideas of central place as a single site, towards conception of “central place complex” – a network of sites with different economic, ritual and identity building functions (Andersson 2009, 18). Possible studies showing the change of power relations in the southern Scandinavia should include the element discussing how this changes were reflected at the burial ground, transgressing the traditional question about the role of Christianisation.

The importance of cemeteries as places where power relations were constructed is emphasised by placing them in context of political developments of the late 10th c. The cemeteries ceased to be used at the beginnings of the 11th c., what was interpreted as an effect of adoption of Christianity and development of the network of parish churches in the beginning of the second half of the 11th c. The abandonment is presented as a lengthy process taking place over around 60 years from ca. year 990 (Svanberg 1999, 68). During this time, the rural cemeteries were used along the large churchyards constructed next to the churches in Lund and Löddeköpinge²⁹. As the older cemeteries still remained in use, the question frequently asked is if there are any Christian burials there? It cannot be answered at any levels of probability, since it seems that there are no criteria which could help to identify a Christian burial with a certainty (Lund 2013, 47; Svanberg 1999, 48–51). The burial practice should probably be also viewed not as the evidence of conversion of local population, but more as a means to achieving it – through the change of burial customs the change of religion was possible. However, the local version of Christianity must be seen as a result of a process that not only encapsulated acculturation on the side of old customs, but also a certain level of the hybridisation the side of the new (Urbańczyk 2009a, 144; Lund 2013, 47–48). Two dimensions connected to the religion change must be recognised to avoid confusion – a personal dimension, when an individual decides to follow certain belief, and a wider social and political level in which religion change becomes a part of changing power relation (Svanberg 1999, 48). If through the funerals the societies were created and cemeteries were places where negotiations of alliances and power took place, it would be important to control them. This could be a reason for establishing large burial grounds in Scania, in the places where royal presence is archaeologically attested. The fact that the burials still continued on certain earlier burial grounds in Scania points to certain flexibility on behalf of Danish kings and their skills in creating personal alliances. To prove my point, a short description of the latest dated burials from the cemeteries is needed.

At sites of Norrvidinge, Stävie and Önsvala burials in coffins made of wagon bodies were found. In all three burials, remains of exclusive textiles, adorned with gold and silver thread were found, probably imported from Byzantium or Orient (Larsson 1981,7; Nockert 1981, 208), as well as glass beads and a knife. In burial from Önsvala, a bronze round gilded brooch with a cross pattern was found, similar to the one discovered in Lund in context dated to 1020–1050 (Larsson 1981b, 7). The graves with wagon bodies used as coffins have a very restricted geographical distribution – they are found on Jutland, northern Germany (Roesdahl 1977, 132) and in Scania (Larsson 1981, 5–7). The graves can be connected to the upper strata of the Viking Age society (Roesdahl 1977, 132) and have a very restricted

²⁹ Both of the new burial grounds probably served the population of the whole region, as over 10,000 burials have been discovered in Lund, and excavators estimate that at least 2,500 people were buried at Löddeköpinge (Svanberg 1999, 63–64).

chronology, appearing generally after the first half of the 10th c. (Kleiminger 1994, 110). The wagon bodies are sometimes placed in chamber and sometimes covered by burial mounds (Kleiminger 1994, 114), however, flat graves without external markings are also known, for example from Fyrkat. This burial custom was often described as pagan sign of resistance against Christianisation, following from Norwegian finds from Oseberg and Gokstad, but now in a light of new evidence more nuanced approaches are introduced. I. Hägg compared textile materials from Christian context of cemeteries at Schleswig, with materials from rich burials from Thumbby Bienebek. She proposed that two of the women buried there in wagon burials could be buried in simple garments similar to christening robes. In one case the woman would be dressed in this kind of coarse shirt underneath her more elaborate cloths, in the other this would be her whole dress. In one of the burials brooch with cross motives appears as well, however alongside pendants interpreted as Thor's hammers (Hägg 2007, 104). The occurrence of valuable grave goods should not lead archaeologist to believe that Christian ideology would not be reflected in the burial. The population had employed in their ritual performances ideas that made their way into their habitus.

At sites of Ljungbacka (G18), Stävie (G40) and Norrvidinge, inhumation burials were discovered in which axes were found. Comparing to central Sweden or Norway, burials containing weapons are rare and mostly concentrated on Jutland (Pedersen 2011, 53). The axe burials dated to the 10th c. are tied to a social group of man and are believed to be an indication of office (Näsman 1991, 174). F. Svanberg proposed that the rune stone from Fosie, mentioning the title of *dreng*, can be related to the man buried in the G18 grave at Ljungbacka (Svanberg & Söderberg 2000, 94).

What can further tie the possible 10th c. burials from Scanian rural cemeteries to expressions of royal power, or willingness to show the associations with it, is the find from burial at Norrvidinge. There, a round gilded pendant was found that can be seen as an imitation of Terslev style (Svanberg 2003b, 285). This type of jewellery is sometimes interpreted as precious gifts from the Danish ruling dynasty to their royal vassals (Svanberg 1998, 118–119). The find from Norrvidinge proves that the global politics influenced the burial practice of local populations, even if the significance of the object could be different from that of a royal gift. Its inclusion in the assembly means that someone came into contact with Terslev style ornaments, and even if it is an imitation, decided to use it during a funeral ceremony.

In Randsborg's opinion, male graves with axes and female graves in wagon cases represent the upper strata of Society that was connected to the Jelling dynasty (Larsson 1981b, 9). If this was the case, the graves influenced by the growing Danish royal power would appear on four of the cemeteries used in the study. This kind of customs of equipping the graves might point to the migration of elite members from Jutland to Scania, or adoption of elements connected to royal court by local Scanian elites. What is most important is the fact that the people who manifested their connection to traditions practised across Denmark were operating on the western Scanian rural cemeteries. In my opinion, this is a sign of royal control over the local population that also made its way to cemeteries, as arenas for ritualised performance. If, in fact, the burials were connected to Jelling dynasty, it is possible to assume that the elements stressing the belonging to larger court organisation made their way into local traditions. Symbolism related to the king was incorporated in society reconstruction. In the second half of the 10th c. the highest variation is visible in the Danish grave ritual (Kleiminger 1993, 144); it is likely that this can reflect the process of social changes that were under way. From before this time, there are no graves with equal display of wealth, that could be dated to the Viking Age on rural Scanian cemeteries. Two scenarios are possible – the

personal change of people in charge, or reorientation of their alliance towards emerging danish royal power. Rich burial goods can be seen as gifts through with the support of local elites was bought or as a means to legitimise the new overclass.

The 10th c. was a turbulent time for Scania, according to skaldic verses. It is possible that the region was invaded from Norway in the first half of the century, but was later regained by Harald Bluetooth (Strömberg 1961a, 191). In the time around reign of that king fascinating processes took place in Western Scania. Two ringforts were built in two last decades of the century at Trelleborg on site of an older fortress (Carlie 2008, 116; Jacobsson 2003, 195) and at Borgeby (around a kilometre from Stävie), at the site of an older village (Svanberg & Söderberg 2000, 66). The city of Lund was established also around that time, probably to decrease the influence of inhabitants of the site at Uppåkra (Svanberg 1999, 11). In Löddeköppinge large amounts of personal items connected to possible Slavonic population were found (Svanberg & Söderberg 2000, 316). Around the early 11th c., the elite settlement from Lockarp village site, that could be viewed as dependant from old power seat at Uppåkra, was moved, and the new houses were build as Trelleborg type (Carlie 2008, 133). This type of buildings is often interpreted as a means of displaying loyalty or connection to Danish royalty, as same buildings were discovered at the ringforts (Svanberg & Söderberg 2000, 81). Trelleborg type house was also built at the magnate estate at Västervång (Carlie 2008, 133). Some scholars see the origins of the hundred organisation in the region in the time during the 11th c. (Fabech 1994, 222).

The rebuilding and moving of smaller, local power centres can be related to changing personal alliance, and abandonment of old networks to connect to the more promising one, related to the danish King. Similarly, the influx of foreign people – Englishman in Lund, and Slavs in, among others, Löddeköppinge area – may reflect an attempt to create a loyal base of followers, not related to the people occupying the area that the state planned to control. Outsiders, not tied by personal connections to any of locals, would not have had any problem with enforcing the King's will.

Schmidt-Sabo, in her work about the formation of the villages relied on the assumption that the state societies cannot coexist with societies in which power is based on kin relations (1997, 678). Svanberg sees the process taking place in Scania, and generally in Denmark, as transition from power based on control over people and personal relations to power based on controlling a territory (Svanberg 1998, 121). Both of these descriptions are problematic, as they benefit from the fact that they describe a historical process, whose outcome is already known. It leads to a false sense of seeing individual actions as leading to a goal – in this case the creation of medieval kingdom of Denmark and a nation in a further perspective. I agree with Urbańczyk, that kings should be viewed as individuals who strived to increase their control and power (2009, 146). The source of power of an Early Medieval Scandinavian leader was based on his followers. Social bonds that constitute the social relation between the lord and the subjects were based on patron-client relations and friendship or marriage, and had to be “performed” regularly to ensure their stability (Hermanson 2011, 64–65). Cemeteries, as places where alliances were forged through performing ritualised actions, were crucial places to control.

Another factor, probably connected to the changes taking place at the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th c., that could influence the role of rural cemeteries is stabilisation of the villages, that were relocated (Callmer 1991, 345; Schmidt-Sabo 1997). The reasons for this were the consolidation of Christianity with formation of parish institution and creation of a stable base for taxation from property owners, and increased control and ownership over the villages executed by the nobility (Callmer 1991, 347; Poulsen & Sindbæk

2011, 7). Process of abandonment of strikingly similar, except the east-west orientation of majority of graves, cemeteries from the 8th to around 10th c. known from Anglo Saxon England is usually connected to the introduction of open field system that requires more cooperation on behalf of the village population, and emergence of parish churches that were the new focal point for identities of rural communities (Astill 2011,223–229). If, in fact, the villages were moving, and their inhabitants were buried at the rural cemeteries of Scania, it is possible that the grave fields could have been a monument fixing communal identity despite the fluent nature of settlement patterns. Switching the monument to a Christian parish church and its churchyard should be seen as important transformation that tied societies to centrally administered power. Again, the control over the arena of social interaction has to be seen as providing the king and church with more tools to influence the creation of community.

2.1.8 Conclusion

Rural cemeteries have to be seen as a part of a central place complex, where societies were constructed after the death of a community member. They were probably used only for burial of selected members of community, however, the relatively small amount of discovered burials might be related to excavation techniques and site preservation.

The control over the ritualised actions was an important part of constituting power relations in the communities. Studies concerned with social transformation of the late Viking Age should be more occupied with question of control over burial places, and how it could be used in constructing new relation between the king and the subjects.

Rituals could be partially seen as “legal” in nature, supporting claims for land inheritance, as there is a possibility that the Ting sites were located at the same places or nearby.

Topographical placement of the sites supports the interpretation of rituals as public, and stresses the importance of cemeteries as places that were supposed to be seen during daily activities. It also points to a conclusion that the boundary between living population and the population of the ancestors was fluent. The population of the living provided the dead with identity, through remembrance, and the dead provided the living with cosmological legitimation to land, and identity through construction of genealogy. In the following chapters, traces of actions that can be interpreted as creating the relations with the dead will be examined by analysis of traces from particular burials.

2.2 Use of cremated human remains in the context of inhumation burials

In 32 of graves from western Scanian cemeteries, an interesting phenomena was observed. Traces of activities related to fire and burning were observed in connection to burial. In 24 cases, burned bone material have been observed. Cremated human remains have been recovered from stratigraphical contexts in 17 graves indicating their deposition during the establishment of features interpreted as inhumation burials. Their location in the fills of the graves, without traces of latter pits, indicates their simultaneous deposition, or

deposition soon after refilling of the burial pits with soil³⁰. In most cases, at Ljungbacka, where the cremated remains were weighted, the weight of human bones excavated from the fill is smaller than 10 g (Samuelsson 1998, 16). In the actual cremation graves found on the Scanian rural cemeteries this amount varied from less than one gram to 53,6 g (Samuelsson 1998, 32). Data from the same cemetery, supported by findings from Råga Hörstad, indicates that both humans and animals were subject to cremation and deposition in the fills of the graves (Samuelsson 1998; Strömberg 1968). Similar traces have been observed in Norrvidinge (Lindskog 1967, 42), but the extent of the practice is unknown due to the lack of excavation report or any other description of the finds and features. On a number of drawings, of burials later dated by F. Svanberg to the Viking Age and on the ones probably from preceding periods, discolourations related to material that could derive from cremation were marked. It is hard to judge about its content without further description. Possibly, the grave 69 could formally be similar to no. 5 or no. 3 from Önsvala, or some of the burials known from Zealand, as the cremation material is spread in the upper part of the fill above the skeleton. In one of the other burials, datable to the Viking Age (no. 59, appendix, fig. 66),³¹ two large charred logs were placed parallel to the skeleton. In other burials dating to the Viking Age, the material displaying signs of burning was found in grave 18 (appendix, fig. 60), grave 3 (appendix, fig. 58) and grave 21 (appendix, fig. 62).

In my opinion, two types of practice should be observed. The first is spreading the cremated material as layer over the burial, observable in grave no. 9 from Önsvala and probably also in burial no. 5 (appendix, fig. 21) and burial no. 3 that can be dated to the Vendel Period, but in last two cases no traces of human bones were identified (Larsson 1981). The second type is the appearance of cremated remains or burned material in other concentrations, that could be further divided into groups. First group consists of cases in which the material is concentrated in a manner that can indicate a deposition similar to cremation pit without additional construction, one of examples can be the burial no. 11 from Råga Hörstad³². The second type is represented by graves G6 (appendix, fig. 5) and G17 (appendix, fig. 10) from Ljungbacka where burned material was encountered in rectangular patches that can indicate a use of an organic container that had decomposed (Samuelsson 1998, 16). The first kind of practice, in my opinion, indicates an intentional deposition, as the accidentally spread material would be distributed more evenly in the fill of the burial. Similar opinion was expressed by Ulriksen, in connection to the graves A2066³³ and A2033 from Trekroner Grydehøj on Zealand, where the burned bones and charcoal were mostly present in

³⁰ Excavators do not provide information, except the burial ground at Trelleborg, if any human remains were spread around the graves – cremated or not. Possibly, it is related to practice of removal of the topsoil that could easily remove the layers of the past ground surface, destroying any traces. In case of Danish burial ground at Køstrup, the excavators excluded the possibility of transfer, as the nearest cremation burial was 20 m from the single burial in which cremated remains were found (Lindblom 1993, 147–148).

³¹ The presence of large logs can be a proven that the materials buried in the inhumation graves are pyre remains.

³² This burial can be, however, also classified as overlaying cremation burial.

³³ In this interesting burial, osteological sexed as male, in the upper part of the fill a set of artefacts usually associated with a woman were found, including an oval brooch, a conical spindle whorl and a red and white glass beads. In the bottom level of the burial, where the skeleton was found, except of a knife and iron unidentified artefacts, two weights were found. The weights are of the type around 50 years younger than the oval brooch found in the burial (Ulriksen 2011, 226). It can indicate that, if in fact, the brooch was deposited during the filling of the inhumation, it was at least 50 years old.

the upper parts of the fill of the burial (2011, 189). Concentrations of burned bones were also encountered in a burial from Lejre, grave no. 1035 (Wulf Andersen 1995, 57); observations from this site indicate that the concentrations of the burned materials must have been formed before filling in the burial, as they were placed in piles leaning on the walls of the grave pits (Anderson 1960, 28). Similar deposits were encountered in burials from Kaagården on Langeland (Grøn et al. 1994, 143–144).

Second practice mentioned above, the deposition of the burned bones or remains of fire related activities in a less structured manner in the fill of the inhumation, is known from 20 burials included in this study, among them G19 from Ljungbacka or graves 24 or 16 from Önsvala. This kind of mixed material in the grave fill was interpreted as remains of older cremations destroyed by the inhumation grave (Samuelsson 1998, 16; Ulriksen 2011, 189) and this is a possible interpretation, but not in case of cemeteries without cremation graves or grave groups on the cemeteries that do not have cremation graves within them – as it is in case of Ljungbacka (Samuelsson 1998, 16). Another possibility is unintentional mixing of older settlement material, certainly a possibility that occurs at sites of Ljungbacka, Råga Hörstad or Önsvala, where settlements from earlier periods than Late Iron Age were identified. However, these interpretations can be challenged in light of the material known from Denmark. On Zealand, at Trekroner Grydehøj, burned material was found in 52% of the burials, at Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken in 60% (Ulriksen 2011, 189) and at Ottestrup in over a half of the 55 inhumation burials burned human bones were found (Eriksen 1992, 187), similar finds are known from Rytterkær (Jønsson 1992, 39) or Kjøvejen (Kelinminger 1994, 129) and Forlev (Bronsted 1936, 194). In a large number of burials from Lejre, charcoal and burned bones were found, however, only in three cases the bones were identified as human, but the remains were never systematically investigated (Wulf Andersen 1995, 99). Another example is known from Køstrup on Funen, where parts of burned human cranium were identified in the fill of the inhumation burial ACZ (Lindblom 1993, 147). In graves from Kaagården on Langeland, the human remains, as well as charcoal, were deposited in the fills of inhumations, including a chamber grave CR (Grøn et al. 1994, 143–144). The frequent occurrence of the deposition of the material that can derive from cremation rituals in the fills of inhumation makes it highly unlikely that the depositions were unintentional. The Scanian examples, viewed in light of the evidence from Denmark seem to conform to common pattern of burial practice, both when it comes to deposition forming an observable concentration or loose spreading of the remains in the fill of the grave pit.

In light of written sources, two interpretations of the phenomena were proposed – a symbolical one resulting from *Odin's law*, following passages from *Ynglinga*³⁴ saga or a faster way to afterlife, as explained by one of the mourners to Ibn Fadlan during ceremony described in *Risala*. Another interpretation is looking at animal bones as remains of helping spirits (Ulriksen 2011, 191). Similar traces observed in Danish burials were also interpreted as residues of cult connected to ancestors (Nielsen 1991, 251). Charred wood, pieces of flint and burned bones have been also recovered from inhumation burials belonging to Anglo Saxon period in England (Williams 2008, 248).

Some authors point to later Early Medieval practice known as “charcoal burials” from later christian burial grounds as possible parallel to the custom. These burials where a body of a dead man was placed on a layer of charcoal are known mostly from English Abbey and

³⁴ According to *Odin's law*, written by Snorri Sturluson on Iceland, people should be cremated, and all of their possession placed on the pyre will arrive with them to Vallhall, similarly as possession deposited in the ground. It is somehow ironic that only one possible trace of cremation grave was discovered on Iceland (at Mosfell valley), and the inhumation custom seems to have dominated there during the Viking Age.

Cathedral cemeteries from the 9th to 12th c. Theories about their meaning vary from reminiscence of pagan cremation practices or sign of penance³⁵ to hygienic reasons or a status symbol (Daniel 1997, 158–59). Similar burials were discovered on the cemeteries in Lund³⁶ (Lund 2013, 56). The custom might appear to be similar to practices described in this chapter, but in my opinion, it is impossible to speak of diffusion. The custom of placing pyre remains and cremation material in west-Scanian burials was already known in the Vendel Period, what is indicated by the burial no. 3 from Önsvala, and the deposits are made in a different manner - they are placed after the body was put in the grave pit. The fact that in many cases deposits consist of same amount on bones as “independent” cremation graves suggests that it was not the charcoal that was important, but the context from which the material was taken – the pyre.

Most common perception of the practice, especially when the intentionality of the deposit is evident, as in case of grave 11 from Råga Hörstad or G24 (appendix, fig. 15), G18 (appendix, fig. 11) and G6 (appendix, fig. 5) from Ljungbacka, is to view the cremations as the remains of a sacrifice of an individual of a lower status rather than the person in the inhumation. This difference is inferred from the lack of grave goods that can be associated with the cremated remains (Kleiminger 1993, 103; Strömberg 1968, 39–40; Svanberg 2003, 89; Svanberg 1999, 30). It is a possible interpretation, but in my opinion unlikely, if more modern theoretical approach is applied to the study of cremation burials.

2.2.1 Upper man as an underdog – individuals with status?

The idea, that what is found at the bottom of the feature is the main reason for its existence seems to be deeply rooted in archaeology. F. Svanberg identifies the unburned individuals, often placed at the bottom of the pit as the primary (in terms of importance, not in terms of terminology of field anthropology) burials in the monument (Svanberg 1999, 30). The lack of aesthetic appeal of inhumation remains, and the idea of cremations as an evidence of low scientific value, had convinced numerous archaeologist that it is a “poor man burial” (Williams 2008 239–240). Data derived from experimental archaeology, that allowed to estimate the amount of wood needed to construct the pyre, undermines this opinion. At least two large tree trunks are needed to build a sufficient pyre, an amount of wood that would suffice to heat a dwelling for one person for a year (Høilund Nielsen 2011, 98).

Focusing on modest, empirically experienced remains fails to recognise them for what they really are – an evidence of a complex process, that occurs on a technological, social and spiritual level and has to be viewed as an act of transformation and probably creation of a being (Oestigaard 2000, 42; Williams 2008, 252f). Archaeologists basing the interpretation solely on the burial have access just to a final step of a funeral, that consisted of series of rituals (Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 6), which could have taken place at different times and at different places, making the parts of ritual display even more efficient (Williams 2008, 246). In the case of cremations, at least three stages can be proposed: cremation, intermediate

³⁵ I. Hägg had interpreted charcoal burials known from Lund as post mortem penance, connected to the cult of saint Lawrence – a saint especially popular in Denmark. He had achieved martyrdom by being slowly roasted over the fire, and the charcoal connected to the fires that were lit in his celebration was believed to help the souls in the purgatory (Hägg 2007, 103).

³⁶ Lund must be viewed as a city with a special connection to England, as finds from the earliest phases of the city indicate presence of Englishmen among the population (Svanberg & Södeberg 2000, 234–235).

period of varied length and the burial of the remains (Oestigaard 2013, 500; Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 44).

Encountering the final stage of deposition of the remains, Svanberg's interpretation fails to recognise this temporal span which was probably tied to construction of the cremation burial, and focuses on its modest appearance and general lack of burial equipment. There is a difference between so called "pyre goods" and "grave goods" – some artefacts were excluded from the deposition in the cremation graves. As concerning the lack of monumentality in the burial – the pyre can be considered as a temporary monument allowing the display of the deceased (Williams 2008, 246) in its "staged" appearance, that might have possessed some even more dramatic, interactive features, involving all of the senses of participants since the body would be burning, probably for hours (Williams 2004, 217). As opposed to inhumation rites, during cremation the transformation of the corpse is made perfectly visible to the attending people.

Another weakness of judging the burials according to the number and quality of grave goods is the fact that in categories of burial equipment F. Svanberg focused on most durable goods like jewellery, weapons and riding gear, tools etc – mostly objects made of metal. This way of thinking excludes the idea that in some cases the burned earth and stone from the cremation site might have been considered as a grave good (Williams 2008, 243), as well as ignores the importance of perishable goods like e.g. food (Back-Danielson 2007, 271ff). In light of most theories about the Viking Age societies as communities, in which gift giving was crucial to maintain social relations, most of the items could have been distributed among the participants of the ceremony. This all indicates that the rank cannot be judged on the basis of a choice between cremation and inhumation, or the exclusion of grave goods.

I believe that search for a main burial in such structures is not a proper approach towards interpretation of the burial context. In the following section the focus will be placed on the idea of grave as an outcome of a planned action, that is conducted according to ideas on what is a proper means for achieving a successful transformation of the dead individual and the participants.

2.2.2 Bone as a transformative substance

New interpretations can be drawn from ideas described by Fowler, drawing from ethnological research of Strathearn and others (2001, 50–52) in *Archaeology of Personhood*. It is possible, instead of looking at the cremated material as the remains of an individual, to interpret them as a substance with certain qualities or parts of a dividual person. Cremation can be viewed as a process that speeds up the natural transformations occurring in the cadaver (Nilsson-Stutz 2006, 23), removing the flesh, often considered as impure (Oestigaard 2000, 43), and bringing the remains to a state in which further transformation is unnoticeable, what can create a sense of transformed bones being eternal (Back-Danielson 2007, 252). Cremated remains in this state could have been kept without depositing them in the ground for long periods of time.

Archaeologists are pointing nowadays to cases when human burned bones were excavated from contexts other than burials, mentioning cooking pits, hearths, property borders, postholes and the thresholds of houses (Back-Danielson 2007, 245). Since in newer approach towards mortuary archaeology transformative role of funeral is stressed, I would argue that instead of looking for an individual with a status in a small amount of deposited cremation remains, it is necessary to turn the researcher's attention to probable

functions of the burial other than creating a final resting place for the dead. Ethnographic research supports this idea with evidence of cremation remains being drowned in water, displayed above ground, kept at home, used to build statues and create portable artefacts or even being consumed (Williams 2008, 243). The act of deposition of the remains in the ground cannot be viewed as a necessity.

On the basis of evidence of bones of unidentifiable species being used as a temper in ceramic vessels found at Gudme and Uppåkra (Jennbert 2004, 201), and the idea that bones, including human, might have been used in the process of carbonisation of iron to create steel, it is possible to argue that they might have been viewed upon as possessing transformational qualities or even regenerative power (Back-Danielson 2007, 242ff). Two stories from Old Norse mythology come to mind – the idea of world being created from the bones of Ymir and the story of god Thor's goats that regenerate themselves from their bones after being eaten³⁷. The funeral should be viewed as implementation of “spiritual technology” – a rational decision on what steps are appropriate to reach an outcome of incorporating the transformed dead to the society. Items, such as burned bones, possessing transformative qualities, could be seen as essential in the process.

To further break with the old concepts about burial and funerals, it is important to stress that it is not only the dead who undergoes the transformation. The funerals are mainly for the surviving community (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 37). From late republican Rome, an interesting custom is known, that is stressing the transformation undergone by the family. A part of the corpse was removed before the cremation, it was later burned on a smaller separate pyre, in rites connected to purification at the end of the mourning period and buried in a separate place – by this practice the new order was constituted and (re)created, symbolically bringing the mourners back to society (Graham 2009, 55–56).

Of course, this cannot be treated as an analogy to situation known from Scania, and the exact meaning of the deposition of burned human remains is probably beyond the scope of archaeological inquiry, but it is important to recognise the effect of the burial ceremonies on the living, even if they involve such a “personal” object as a body part. It is their interest that is at stake, and their social position that is mainly altered when a person gets buried.

2.2.3 Conclusion

The actual practice is hard to reconstruct, as the fact that the amount of time between the cremation and disposition of the remains may vary. It can be observed, however, from the stratigraphical position of the pyre remains, that they were placed in the burial after the body was already in the pit and the infilling started. Grave G9 from Ljungbacka can be used to argue that the cremations and inhumations took place at the same funeral ceremony, because of clear traces of burned planks or branches in the fill of the burial, however, the possibility that the pyre remains might have been kept for later ceremonial use needs to be considered as well. The fact that containers were probably used in graves G6 and G17 from the same site (Samuelsson 1998, 16), with the observation about the dating of the oval

³⁷ An interesting notion must be considered here – the goats are cooked before being eaten. This means that their bodies are exposed to heat before their later “resurrection”.

brooch discovered in A2066 in relation to weights found in the bottom part of the burial³⁸ from Trekrøner Grydehøj from Zealand (Ulriksen 2011, 190) can point to a conclusion that the cremation remains might have been kept for some time before the deposition. Based on the finds from settlement sites including human remains, archaeologists working with Stone Age postulated that they were used to form ties between people (Jennbert 2004, 196); strangely, archaeologists are reluctant to point to similar conclusions for the later parts of the prehistory, even though burned human bone was recovered from Iron Age settlement context, for example in Halland, at Sannagård³⁹. Other context in which cremated human bone is found throughout Scandinavia includes property boundaries, heaps of fire cracked stones, cooking pits and fields (Goldhahn & Oestigaard 2008, 232). Burned human bones were clearly used not only for burial (Oestigaard 2013, 497).

The remains from the pyres seem to be an important element in west-Scanian burial rituals, demonstrating links with the lands of present-day Denmark⁴⁰. The meaning of placing them in the fill of the graves is unknown, but I find it important to abandon processual approaches concentrated in assigning status to the remains. Instead, it is crucial to recognise other possibilities, rather than search for individuals. The approach that recognises the cremated bones as substance with possible transformative properties seems to be more accurate, as the fact is that the quantity of bone material, that can be described as “token deposit” (McKinley 2013, 155) and can hardly be taken for remains of a whole individual used as a grave good.

The link to the actual person could be retained, as they were the remains of someone’s transformation process, but in my opinion, it would be unwise to discuss them in the terms of sacrifices or dependency of people. The cremated dead can no longer be conceptualised as a being with “earthly” status. In my opinion, they cannot be perceived as a being removed from daily concerns and activities of the descendants – they just overwent an identity/personhood transformation, and now had a different social role to “perform”. Oestigaard contrasts the cremation, that in his opinion can be seen as dissolution or separation of the deceased social identities, with inhumation, where the integrity and unity of the body is preserved. The cremation remains could be actively used by the funeral participants in the process of society reconstruction (Oestigaard 2013, 500). The similar concern with the integrity of the body is displayed, in opinion of Lund, in Christian burials, as

³⁸ This reasoning is of course allowed under assumption, that the oval brooch found in the upper layers of the fill along with glass beads and a damaged spindle whorl and burned bones are related to each other and constitute one deposit, as a burial of a woman. Unfortunately, there is no way of proving that each artefact was not deposited as a separate action.

³⁹ In the postholes associated with the building human bones were encountered; the excavators interpreted the building as a place where the bones were processed after the cremation on the pyre (Artelius 2000, 176).

⁴⁰ In South-eastern Scania, cremation burials are a dominant practice, and stone settings are used to mark the graves (Svanberg 2003b, 98), In Northern-eastern Scania, the inhumations were practised (Svanberg 2003b, 108) but there were not as many similarities to areas of Zealand or Langeland as in the South-western part of Scania.

opposed to earlier pagan Scandinavian practices where bodies were often fragmented⁴¹ (Lund 2013, 56).

Both authors' opinions do not exactly fit to the western Scanian material, where also not cremated human bones were recovered from the fills of burials, and are contradicted by the observations from Christian burial grounds, where body parts were often removed when one grave was intersecting into another. The integrity of the body, if important during the inhumation process, seems to be a concern only during the actual ceremony. Later, the human remains could be used in other contexts, even in Christianity. The widespread use of relics⁴² can testify to the importance of human remains, even in the later Middle Ages.

In the case of Scanian material, propositions of possible meaning should focus on ideas of using the power of ancestors (either as transformed individuals or as general category of beings) in the transformation of other dead individual. This kind of public performance would also be an occasion to establish and create social links between the dead and the descendants, or maybe even between various, still living, groups of people. If the kinship is understood as a personal constructed relation that is in many cases situational and can be strategically used and created by individual (Vogt 2010, 9), the importance of funerals and use of cremated remains – a transformative substance, that derives from an actual person who had formed its ties during their life course, cannot be undervalued. Unfortunately, the questions who was cremated, if it was simultaneous with the inhumation or in what number of deposits remains of one person could be found cannot be answered at the current state of research.

2.3 Grave overlays, grave re-use and successive double burials

I propose that three different practices can be observed at South-western Scanian cemeteries – the overlaying of graves, re-using of graves and successive double burials. All these practices seem to have in common a concern with spatial arrangements of the monuments, and they all involved an interaction with the area and sometimes with contents of the past burials. I would, however, postulate that they need to be defined more closely, as in the current research a confusion can be observed, for example re-use can be discussed in the same manner as an overlay, whereas and in my opinion, the practices should be treated as separate.

In her PhD thesis, E. Thäte defined the re-use as using the same monument for burial after it not being used for at least 200 years or one archaeological period. She employed this reasoning to mark the distinction between the use of a place for successive burials and returning to previously constructed feature with an already a “historical” value (2007, 9). Her definition is not useful for analysis of data presented in this thesis. Here the re-use of a grave is defined as a practice in which a grave was opened, the remains of the former deceased removed, and a new body was buried in the older structure.

⁴¹ Lund's conclusion seems to be valid, however, there is no radical break in fragmentation of body between Christianity and paganism. The difference is in scale. It can be observed that veneration applied to a larger group of the ancestors becomes restricted towards a smaller group – saints (continental example: Geary 1998, 42–43).

⁴² A fascinating fact is that the time when the continental Europe was mostly obsessed with remains of the saints is during the period 700 to 1100, when the trade in them flourished, coincides with the Viking Age in Scandinavia (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 50; Geary 1994, 175–193).

A-M. Hållans Stenholm, in her thesis about construction of the memory in the Mällar Valley, presents a different approach. She does not see re-use and continuity as a contradiction (2012, 10). She investigates the practice of placing graves and houses over older structures, without providing the reader with a clear definition. I am more inclined to agree with her approach, but I am forced to voice my concerns about the intentionality of producing a monument that would be used continuously, and re-use of monument that was intended as a single burial. In this case reuse and continuity are not the same, as one is just following a design and other is a break from it. In this thesis overlays will be understood as a separate practice than re-use. I define them as practice of placing a burial partially on, or completely over, the older monument.

The third practice that can be classified as re-use, is a successive burial. On Danish and Scanian cemeteries, a large group of burials in which one body is stratigraphically placed over another was found. They are classified as double burials, but excavators usually make a distinction between the ones that can be classified as the result of simultaneous deposition during a one ceremony and those formed through two successive funerals (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 8). As a means to distinguish between the two types of deposition stratigraphic observations are necessary (Skaarup 1989, 6). Another way is to observe if there is any damage or disturbance to the underlying (buried first) skeleton (Nilsson-Stutz 2003, 305; Skaarup 1989, 6). If the burial is a result of two distinct funeral ceremonies, it would be more correct to classify it as an overlay. Again, however, the problem of intentionality at the initial stage of monument construction seems to be a problematic question here. If the initial design was made to contain two bodies some precautions would have to be made, like, for example, digging of a pit deep enough to accommodate two individuals and marking the burial in the way that would make the second funeral possible. For this reason the division will be kept, even though formal similarities occur.

In the thesis, I am following Thäte's approach towards monuments. Not only the externally marked graves but also graves without any external marking will be understood as monuments(Thäte 2007, 7).

2.3.1 Cremation overlays of inhumation burials

The previous chapter contains a discussion of interpreting the cremation remains that could not be deposited after the funeral resulting in creation of inhumation burial. In this subchapter, the analysis of remains that could have been deposited at the later stages of the site use will be undertaken. These are simple "cremation pits" cutting into upper layers of the fill of the inhumation. Because of the lack of datable burial goods and C14 datings, the exact chronological relation between deposits cannot be established. The fact that the cremations form separate stratigraphic contexts can point to later deposition. In this case, the burial can be treated as a type of overlaying burials.

The evidence for this practice is known mainly from Ljungbacka, what can be the result of careful excavation, during the stage of topsoil removal. There, five burials had from one to four cremation pits cutting into them. A possible addition to those examples is grave 11 from Råga Hörstad (appendix, fig. 35), where a cremation pit cuts into the fill of the burial, and also through the boundaries of the original grave cut. It is, however, later stratigraphically superimposed by a layer that was also covering burial no.10. The possible cremation burial is further covered by a single large stone (Strömberg 1968, 13-17).

The graves at Ljungbacka, in whose fills the cremations were deposited, display a variation in internal composition. Some are simple inhumations without traces of a container, as grave G1 or G4 (appendix, fig. 3). In two burials, G2 (appendix, fig. 1) and G6 (appendix, fig. 5), a coffin was probably used. In one of the wealthiest graves at the cemetery, G18⁴³ two cremation pits were found. In the fills of the burials in graves G1, G2 and G18, except the deposits, traces of charcoal and cremated bone were found. In graves G1 and G4, stones were placed in the fill of the burial as well. The most complex burial seems to be the G6, where, except stones and four cremation pits, at the bottom of the grave distinct deposits of cremated remains were found from which also cremated bone was retrieved.

It seems that the practice cuts across all the usual status symbols, but it is spatially restricted, as graves with secondary cremations are placed in a group located to the north-west of the Bronze Age mound, with exception of G18 and possibly G24 (Samuelsson 2001, 100–101).

The amount of cremated human bone recovered from the deposits is below 100 g, which gives a possibility to doubt that the deposits are actual burials, understood as creation of a place for resting remains of a dead person. The pits could be interpreted as traces of other, unspecified rituals, connected to deposition of human remains (McKinley 2013, 154) or possible pyre sites, with pits dug to ensure better air circulation, to which later debris and possibly parts of cremated deceased fell, or in which they were intentionally deposited. If, however, they are burials, in my opinion the reasons for creating the overlay can be similar to inhumation burials overlays, which will be discussed in later part of the thesis. Samuelsson viewed them as a possible expression of kinship (2001, 100).

2.3.2 Inhumation burial overlays

At all the sites that were included in the study overlay of inhumation burials was recorded. At least three types can be observed, taking into consideration the area of overlapping cuts. In my opinion, one category can be partial overlays, where each burial is covered by other in under 50%. The other category is the over 50% overlay. The third category, observable only in Norrvidinge is cutting the graves into the edge ditch of the mound without the contact with the grave pit of the monument.

The partial overlays are most often represented by the burials that have different orientation along the axes related to cardinal points. Most examples for this kind of feature spatial arrangements were found at Stävie. The grave A10 (appendix, fig. 40) oriented on axis NW-SE cut through A11 oriented on axis N-S, in its northern part, where the skull of the individual would be, with its NW part were the feet of individual were placed (Nagmér 1979, 12). A57 (appendix, fig. 44), oriented NNW-SSE, cut with its major part through the grave A58, oriented on axis E-W (Nagmér 1979, 33), in its middle part. A80 (appendix, fig. 48), oriented on axis NNE-SSW, cut through the grave A83 oriented on axis NW-SE (Nagmér 1979, 49) – in those cases it is the lower parts of buried individuals that would overlap. A98 (appendix, fig. 51), aligned on axis ENE-WSW, cut through the whole depth of the damaged

⁴³ The burial can be dated, on the basis of the axe head discovered in it, to the beginning of the 10 c., but a similar type axe was also found in much later dated burial in Mammen in Denmark, in that case the burial could be dated to the second half of the 10 c. (Svanberg & Söderberg 2000, 94). It would mean that the cremation deposits would have to be dated to the time after the half of the 10 c. at least. This would be an interesting observation, going against the ideas of Samuelsson's, that cremation burials had decreased in quantity during the 10th c., what was one of the basis of his dating of burial groups at the cemetery.

burial pit A97 (Nagmér 1979, 63), in the part where the skull of the individual would be. Burial A99 (appendix, fig. 51), aligned on the axis N-S was cut in the part where lower limbs of the individual would be by the burial A100 (Nagmér 1979, 63-65), aligned on axis E-W.

One similar case can be observed in Önsvala, where the grave 22, dated to Vendel Period and aligned on axis N-S has been cut by the grave 23 (appendix, fig. 27) (Larsson 1981, 144-145), dated to Viking Age and aligned on axis NNW-ESE. The cut damaged the skull of the Vendel Period individual, and it was placed underneath the feet of the other skeleton. At Norrvidinge, grave 19, aligned on axis NW-SE, cuts with its South-western corner into grave 20 oriented on axis NNE-SSW, both of the graves are intersected into the edge ditch of the mound of burial 18 (appendix, fig. 61). From the cemetery at Råga Hörstad, two graves were only slightly intersecting. The grave 7a, aligned on axis W-E cut with the North-western edge into northern wall of the pit of grave 7b (appendix, fig. 34), aligned on N-S axis (Strömberg 1968, 12).

The first type of overlays is also known for burials that followed each others orientation, for example burial 12 in Önsvala cut through two – earlier Vendel Period burial 11 and Viking Age burial 13 (appendix, fig. 22) (Larsson 1981, 136-138). The youngest grave was however significantly deeper, damaging the older burials.

The second type of overlays, where the new burial was covering most of the old one, are mostly known from examples that followed each others orientation. Two examples are known from Stävie – burial A68 (appendix, fig. 46), that was unfortunately damaged during the topsoil removal, cut into the burial A69, both oriented on axis NE-SW (Nagmér 1979, 41) and burial A117 (appendix, fig. 52) cut through burial A118, both were oriented on axis E-W (Nagmér 1979, 69). At Önsvala, burial 21 cut through the burial 20 (appendix, fig. 25), damaging it. Probably, both burials were aligned on axis NNE-SSW, but their exact relation is hard to establish since the burial 21 was probably damaged by later reopening (Larsson 1981, 144). At Trelleborg burial 12 was placed partially over the burial 13. Both of the burials were aligned on NNW-SSE axis (Svanberg 2003b, 293). A different situation is known from Ljungbacka, where over the burial G26b (appendix, fig. 17), which was aligned on axis E-W, another burial (or burials) G26a (appendix, fig. 16) was placed in a large irregular pit, roughly aligned on axis N-S. In the burial G26a remains of two individuals were found. One was buried in a prone position (Samuelsson 1998, 15).

The other way of viewing the overlays is to explore if the newer grave cuts through the older entirely or it is just placed over it. The three burials from Önsvala all damage earlier features, but the small extent of the cutting in case of burial 23 might point to that was an accident (Larsson 1981, 145). The fact that the skull was placed back in the original grave can indicate that the older skeleton was treated with respect. At Stävie, A10 cuts through A11 destroying the northern part of the older burial, preservation conditions at the site do not allow to judge what happened to the remains of older burial (Nagmér 1979, 12). The grave A58 is placed over the grave A57, without contact with the grave bottom and any disturbance to possible human remains there (Nagmér 1979, 33). A similar situation is visible in burials A68 and A69 (Nagmér 1979, 41). Burial A80 was roughly the same depth as burial A83 it cut into, but the bad condition of the discovered human remains prevents from reaching any conclusion about how the problem of the actual overlapping of the bodies was handled (Nagmér 1979 49). Burial A98 was cutting through the burial's A97 southern part, and if any remains were present in that area, they were probably moved, in this case it would be the head of the individual buried in an earlier grave (Nagmér 1979, 60-61). Burial A100 cut through upper parts of the fill of burial A99, but the bottom part seems to be left undisturbed (Nagmér 1979, 60-61). When burial A118 was constructed, most of the A117 had to be

removed, unfortunately, both of the pits were damaged during the topsoil removal (Nagmér 1979, 68). At Ljungbacka, the irregular pit G26A was placed above the rectangular pit G26B (Samuelsson 1998, 15) and disturbed the bottom burial. At Norrvidinge, judging from the plan drawings, burial 19 was not disturbing burial 20.

The third type of overlays, probably originally more widespread through sites, is the overlay of the grave with an external feature of the earlier grave without contact of actual burials. It was observable only at the site of Norrvidinge, where into the edge ditch of a burial mound of grave no. 18, burials 21, 22 and burial 19 cut into burial 20 (Svanberg 2003b, 285).

The chronological relations between the intersecting burials is hard to establish – in most cases the only conclusion is that the intersecting burial must be younger. In most of the cases the exact dating is not possible. There are, however, some exceptions. Grave 22 from Önsvala was dated by the use of C14 to Vendel Period (550)(Larsson 1981, 182)) and therefore the grave 23 must be younger, possibly from Viking Age (Svanberg 2003b, 290). The find of a bronze brooch that can be dated to the Vendel Period indicates that burial 11 should probably be dated for this period (Larson 1981a, 136), burial 13, by the occurrence of glass beads datable to period 900–1000 (Svanberg 2003b, 289) can be dated to the Viking Age. This means that the burial 12, intersecting through both of them, must date to the late Viking Age. The damaged grave 20 can be probably dated to the Vendel Period, due to the find of two bronze needles with polyhedral knobs (Larsson 1981, 164), the grave 21 must therefore belong to later part of Vendel Period or Viking Age.

At Trelleborg, the overlaying burial 12 can be dated to the time after the first half of the 9th c., indicating that burial 13 must be younger (Svanberg 2003,b 293–294). At Norrvidinge, in burial 20 a round pendant – an imitation of Terslev style that can be dated to late Viking Age was found. This indicates that burial 19 placed over it must be younger, and burial 18, through whose burial mound edge ditch both the burials cut, must have been older (Svanberg 2003b, 285).

At Ljungbacka, the grave 26A can possibly be dated by the occurrence of iron keys to the Viking Age, and the grave 26B has a less certain dating, based on a spindle whorl and a glass bead also to the Viking Age (Samuelsson 2001, 99).

For burials located at the site of Stävie only relative chronology can be proposed, since only in burial A10 a pottery vessel dateable to the Viking Age was recovered. Here I will follow the assumption that the similarities of burials forms can point towards shorter chronological distance. The reason for this would be a social memory of the past ritual that could be repeated in more exact manner. In light of this theory, the burials A68 and A69, both aligned on axis NE-SW, in containers and without grave goods and burials A117 and A118, also in coffins and aligned E-W, could be divided by shorter chronological distance than others on

the cemetery. Intersecting burials are known from Zealand⁴⁴ and Langeland⁴⁵, and to lesser extend from Funen – at Køstrup, only two burials were intersecting – the grave ACS was placed on the grave ACR (Lindblom 1993, 145).

Two kinds of overlay practice are visible in burial customs that can be related to southern Scandinavian area. One, in which the integrity of the previous burial is preserved and the other, in which it is less of a concern. The attitude towards the earlier burial might be connected to chronological distance between the events, but also might be a reflection of a different ritualised action. The second type of overlays seems similar to the practice of reuse of the burials.

2.3.3 Re-use of monuments

Tracing the reuse of burial pits is connected to tracing the practice of reopening a grave – similar evidence can be used to identify burials that took place in older graves, and were connected to removal of the older body. Excavators point to possibility that the older remains were often deposited in the fill during closing of the new burial (Skaarup 1989, 6; Nagmér 1979). The practice of moving older bones to accommodate the new body is called reduction, and it is crucial to be able to differentiate it from the double burial (Duday 2008, 72). Scattered human remains are often perceived as a sign burial reopening (Aspöck 2011, 320). Similar traces have been, however, also interpreted as a deposition of the unburned body parts in the burial, that might have been taken from earlier burials, possibly simultaneous with the ceremony that resulted in the construction of the monument (Ulriksen 2011, 188). This possibility makes detection of possible reuse, in cases where the stratigraphy is inconclusive, an almost impossible task. The damage done to the Scanian burial grounds through agriculture and also the excavation methods of the 70's have further complicated the issue, as more articulated human remains, that could point to creation of double grave through successive deposition, could be disturbed. In general, the secondary burials have been proven to be more subjected to damage and dispersion than the remains that were not manipulated on after the primary deposition (Lieverse et al. 2006, 1148–1149).

⁴⁴ At Lejre, grave 92b was cutting through grave 92a (which could contain more than one individual), and the bones from individuals buried in 92a were placed in the fill of 92b (Wulf Andersen 1995, 15). Similarly, the grave oriented on axis E-W grave cut into one oriented on axis N-S in feature 994 (Wulf Andersen 1995, 56). At Trekroner Grydehøj three intersecting burials were discovered. A5054 cut through A2055 which in turn, cut into A2056 (Ulriksen 2011, 224).

⁴⁵ At Kaagården, interesting burials were also discovered. Grave BZ was cutting into grave BR, damaging it. In effect, the lower limbs of the skeleton from the older burial were removed, and part of them were deposited in the fill of the younger burial. Into the corner of grave BZ another grave – BY was cutting but it was done in a way that prevented any damage to the older burial (Grøn et al. 1994, 72). At the same site, a grave classified as possible cremation burial DP (burned bones and charcoal were found in the fill), however, judging by the sizes of the pit, it was most probably an inhumation, was cutting into grave DO, damaging the corpses lower limbs. The graves are aligned on a different axis, in a manner known from Stävie or Önsvala (Grøn et al. 1994, 90–91). Similarly, feature GM cut through feature GN, both were interpreted as possible cremation burials, but they seem to be remains of inhumation pits, aligned on different axis (Grøn et al. 1994, 108–109). From the same island, from the site of Kappelsbjerg, two more instances of intersecting burials are known. The grave AC were in fact two burial pits aligned on different axes, with one cutting through the middle of another, damaging the older skeleton. The disturbed remains were later reburied in the fill of younger burial (Grøn et al. 1994, 118–119). Another example is graves E and O which were aligned on the same axis, but the grave O was cutting partially into the grave E. Unfortunately, both features were damaged by ploughing (Grøn et al. 1994, 113)

Most of re-uses were traced at Ståvie. To interpret the burials as results of this kind of deposition, it is necessary to discuss them one by one, starting from the most probable case. In my opinion, five burials classified as double burials can in fact be the examples of burial reuse.

Burial A67 (appendix, fig. 46) is the most probable case. At the bottom of the pit, on discolouration connected probably to a container, heavily decomposed remains of a skeletons were found. A skull of the second individual was encountered around 10 cm above the first. In the section drawing it is visible that the pit cut through an earlier cut made to create the first burial (Nagmér 1979, 40), and therefore it is possible that the second skull, probably placed on the coffin, could be the remains of the older burial earlier located in almost the same place.

A66 (appendix, fig. 46) was interpreted as a probable re-use burial pit by the excavators, as they noted the occurrence of scattered skeletal remains from at least two individuals at different levels of the burial. The pit itself has an irregular outline and also uneven bottom what can indicate that, in fact, there was another pit cutting into it, but it is not visible in the section. The excavators noted that most of the spread bones in the upper part of the fill had completely decomposed, and were just visible as dark discolourations, however, they write about larger part of a skeleton deposited that way. Unfortunately, the drawing does not document this remains, but only more substantial bone fragments (Nagmér 1979, 39).

Similar interpretation was proposed for the burial A73 (appendix, fig. 47). At the bottom of an oval pit ,remains of a skeleton, buried with the head towards SW, were found. In the middle part of the grave, in the fill, remains of another skeleton were spread (Nagmér 1979, 45).

This interpretation was also proposed for burial A72, here the section can indicate that the feature is actually an example of a destructive overlay practice. The excavators note that parts of the older skeleton were left in their original position, while the rest was spread loosely in the fill of the new burial (Nagmér 1979, 45). In the profile drawing, a pit cutting into older burial is clearly visible.

Another burial that could be an example of a re-used monument is A91 (appendix, fig. 50) where, in very small oval pit, a skeleton in an extremely coiled position was buried. Around 10 cm above the bottom burial, in the southern part of the pit, under the feet of the first individual, a stack of human bones was discovered, and in North-western part excavators encountered the skull belonging to another individual (Nagmér 1979, 59).

At Trelleborg, in burial no. 2 from 1990 excavation can possibly be a burial in a re-used pit (appendix, fig. 53), since in the fill of the burial scattered skeleton of the second individual was found (Hanson 1993, 4-5) According to M. Hanson, the burials took place one after another. This is not a possible explanation, since the first body must have been in a skeletonised state – the minimal time span would be around two years. Similar traces of re-use of the burial pits were observed at Bogøvej⁴⁶ on Langeland in Denmark. Possible reburial

⁴⁶ In grave AU the remains of a skeleton were spread loosely in the pit, after the burial of the second individual in a coffin. Legs of the first individual were left in situ in the lowest layer of the feature (Grøn et al. 1994, 27–28).

of earlier disturbed remains was also encountered at Køstrup on Fyn⁴⁷. Two possible cases are known from Zealand⁴⁸.

The relative chronological gap between the re-uses is hard to establish in the case of Stävie or Trelleborg burials, since the preservation conditions and disturbances make it impossible to see if the remains were deposited in any anatomical order. If the fact that they are spread in the fill can reflect the skeletonised state of their deposition, then at least two years must have passed for soft tissue to decompose. It is also difficult to discuss the origins of the disarticulated human remains present in the burials when the stratigraphical information is not adequate.

2.3.4 Double burials as results of successive action

Discussing the problem of double burial, C. Arcini and B. Jacobssen have divided it into two general types. The first, when the dead are placed side by side on the same level of the burial. The second, when one of the dead is placed over another. In their opinion, the first type can generally point towards simultaneous deposition. The second type is more problematic, as the body might be placed over another during a later funeral (Arcini & Jacobson 2008, 6). Overlaying burials are quite frequent on Danish burial grounds (Nielsen 1991, 260), and often the dead are placed exactly over one another, with a surprising precision (Ulriksen 2011, 186). The observation whether the burials were simultaneous or successive is not always possible. Additionally, the fragmentary state of the skeletons deposited in the upper parts of the fill of the burials can be caused either by the damage from agricultural activities or topsoil removal or by the actual deposition of just a part of the skeleton of an individual, as proposed by Ulriksen for some of the burials from Denmark (2011, 188).

Two burials of this kind are known from Trelleborg. One was described before, and it is the overlay of burials 12 and 13 from 1953 excavation. It is possible to classify it as non-simultaneous double burial. Another is the burial no. 4 from 1990 excavations where, surrounded by the edge ditch of the burial mound, a pit with a skeleton classified as a male and buried in a coffin was found. In the fill of the pit there was a visible cut in which fragments of another skeleton were discovered (appendix, fig. 54). The stratigraphy indicated two separate burial actions in the same monument (Hanson 1993, 5-6). At the same site burial A200 was placed directly over the burial A307 (appendix, fig. 55 and fig. 56)(Hellerström 2005, 10).

From Stävie, burial A71 (appendix, fig. 47) can probably also be classified as a successive double burial, however, there are no traces of the skeleton at the bottom of the pit, so it is impossible to interpret whether it is a simultaneous or successive deposition (Nagmér 1979).

At Ljungbacka, articulated remains of skeletons were found at burials G23 and G24. Burial G23 will be discussed in more detail in the section about the possible human sacrifices, as it is commonly interpreted as an instance of simultaneous deposition. The grave

⁴⁷ In burial ACP, next to the skull of a buried person, a foot was discovered (Lindblom 1992, 148).

⁴⁸ Burial A578 from Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken shows signs of re-opening before later reuse, but it seems that the original skeleton was completely removed or decomposed (Ulriksen 2011, 207), and in burial A569 in the fill body parts of an adult male and a child were discovered without anatomical order, what can point towards their deposition in skeletonised state, but it is impossible to judge if they were deposited in the pit before (Ulriksen 2011, 205).

G24 was a burial of two men, buried one over another, however in this case find circumstances do not allow any further interpretation – there are no stratigraphic observations and skeletons were preserved in fragmentary state (Samuelson 1998, 15).

At Norrvidinge, in burial no.16 (appendix, fig. 59) possibly an individual was buried over another, as the levelling of fragmentary preserved human remains indicate. Probably, the one individual was buried in a coffin in a supine position, and the second, of whom only teeth and small fragments of bones remained, was placed on their side in a coiled position.

At Bogøvej at Langeland in Denmark, relatively large number of burials, in which successive deposition of skeletons one over another was attested, have been observed. Burial D was damaged because of ploughing, but probably the remains of an adult woman were buried over the remains of an adult male (Grøn et al 1994, 12). The better preserved grave S can attest to how precisely the upper burial could be placed over the remains of the older one. The remains of a man were placed over a burial of a woman, however, it was probably partially decomposed, since the newer burial damaged the older – the head, the right lower leg and feet were removed, but no sign of their re-deposition have been found (Grøn 1994, 16–17). The third example is the grave AH where an adult man was buried over a skeleton of a child, buried in a coffin in a relatively large, not childlike⁴⁹ pit; excavators are not sure, however, if it is a successive or simultaneous deposition (Skaarup 1989, 6).

From Zealand, evidence for graves with the dead placed one over another is quite wide spread, however the excavation method and publication state make it difficult to judge if the depositions of the bodies were simultaneous or successive⁵⁰. Newer excavations bring conclusive evidence that the successive deposition of the dead in the same grave was practised on the island. At Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken, in grave A577, a female skeleton was placed over an older grave, but no traces of remains from the older burial were encountered, except the coffin discolouration (Ulriksen 2011, 206). From Trekroner Grydehøj, successive burial was confirmed for the grave A292, where an individual was buried over another, probably a woman (Ulriksen 2011, 215). Another example from the same site was burial A505 where over exceptional burial of a woman, which also contained traces of skeletons of a horse and a dog, a pit was dug to bury another woman. In the upper layers of the burial, between the stones placed over it scattered remains of a male skeleton were found (Ulriksen 2011, 218). In burial A2033, a grave of a woman was placed over the grave of a man; the difference of fill colour visible in the profile indicated that it was a successive deposition (Ulriksen 2011, 220). Similarly, a successive burial of a male corpse in earlier woman's grave, that was damaged during the process, was observed in A2036 (Ulriksen 2011, 224). Similar depositions but involving more than two individuals were discovered in burials A2034 and

⁴⁹ Archaeologists are usually convinced that children are buried in shorter pits, and because small bones decompose quite often in the Scandinavian soil conditions, the dimensions are often treated as diagnostic feature for proving child burial (Thäte 2009, 244). Graves like A91 from Stävie, with coiled adult individual in a pit 1,2 x 0,8, or the lower part of burial AH from Bogøvej, measuring 2,1 x 0,95 prove that this approach is completely misleading. Adults could be crammed into small burials and children could be buried in large features, the dimensions are clearly connected not only to the functional aspect of the burial.

⁵⁰ This is certainly the case with excavations from Dråby, where three cases of deposition of human remains in the upper parts of the fill led excavators to postulate the burials as evidence for human sacrifice (Ramskou 1960, 84). Three burials from Lejre – graves 55 (Wulf Andersen 1995, 14), 142 (Wulf Andersen 1995, 15–16) and possibly burial 287 – included remains of individuals positioned in a way that might suggest the successive deposition. Equally mysterious is the situation in grave 36 from Forlev (Brøndsted 1936, 194).

A2035 (Ulriksen 2011, 221). Burials similar to those were also discovered at Hunderup and Trelleborg in Denmark (Ulriksen 2011, 186).

Possibly, the practice is much wider spread in the area of Southern Scandinavia, however, the difficulties with interpreting the stratigraphical relations and the relations between skeletons of individuals make it difficult to observe.

2.3.5 Interpreting the practice – the graves that were not left in peace.

For a long time, intersections and overlaps of graves were perceived as accidental, and lack of them was read as a proof that the burials were externally marked. When the graves intersected, it was often understood as a result of older graves being forgotten (Arcini & Jacobson 2008, 6). Current interpretations point, however, towards intentional nature of the phenomena.

After studying overlaying burials in Mälars Valley and observing their similarities, A.M. Hållans Stenholm concluded they are a result of formalised action, that can be seen as ritualised practice (2012, 216). In my opinion, practices described here also conform to this kind of observation, as they display high level of formal similarities, and their context sets them apart from daily activities. They differ, however, from Central Swedish ones, as the burials are mainly inhumations and traces of mounds are visible only in exceptional examples. The process of creating an overlay points to the intentionality of the action. Hållans Stenholm divided it into three phases – first the choice of the place, second the preparation of the place, and third, placing the overlay (2012, 216). Even if the initial intersecting of a grave could be accidental, then in the sequence of action the presence of the older burial must have been observed and decision had to be made to continue. It makes the whole practice a conscious choice of the individuals responsible for burial. Discussing the re-use of graves at christian burial ground at Raunds Furnells in England, H. Williams notes that handling of the past human remains had to be a visible act during the funerals, that had to be somehow addressed by the participants (Williams 2006, 112). The situation in South-western Scania had to be similar, and surely, even the accidental encounter of human remains required a conscious response from the attending population, turning it into intentional action.

The spatial distribution of the burials at the cemeteries is also pointing towards the intentionality of intersection, overlays and re-uses. The cemeteries in South-western Scania are generally believed to be composed of clusters of graves (Svanberg 2003b) and uneven distribution of the burials is visible, creating plenty of space to bury the dead without any danger of disturbing the older burial (Thäte 2007, 193), if it was intentional. The restriction of the burial grounds to the strictly delimited area of sanctified ground seems to be introduced with Christianity (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 233). Spatial arrangement of the grave field should be viewed as a means of displaying social relations (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 218; Sayer 2011, 145), and there is a reason for the graves to concentrate in certain areas. The concentrations are clearly visible in examples of Stävie, Önsvala, Norrvidinge or Ljungbacka sites. They were interpreted most often as representing villages or family groups and as phenomena related to chronological development of the cemetery (Samuelsson 2001, 100–101 ;Svanberg 2003b). I am inclined to agree with the concept that the groups are, in fact, a means to display a social connection, but in my opinion, the definition of a family needs reworking. Sayer's interpretation, viewing the grave groups on Anglo-Saxon cemeteries as belonging to "extended households" composed of kinsmen, friends and dependants (Sayer 2011, 169) is more congruent with the model of social relations in the Viking Age. However,

the lack of status indicators or chronological indicators in the burials makes studies of this kind particularly difficult in regards to South-western Scania. It is also important to remember that a burial at the sites was probably a selective practice, and not every person received an inhumation burial (similar opinions referring to Early Medieval Scotland: Maldonado 2013, 23).

Having these concepts in mind, I find it important to turn the reader's attention to the rare examples when traces of possible external features were recovered archaeologically at the cemeteries in question. At Norrvidinge, the burials seem to cluster around the edge ditches of possible burial mounds. Around burial 18, quite rich for Scanian standards, four other burials are located intersecting into its external feature. At Trelleborg, not only there is a trace of successive burial in the burial no. 4 from 1990 excavations, but also two burials, one being a case of re-use of burial pit and one a successive deposition of two people in overlying graves located near it. It is possible, the same situation took place at burial 16 in Norrvidinge. An interesting observation can be conducted at Önsvala, where graves from different time periods are located in the vicinity of the only preserved monument – the burial mound over a late Roman Iron Age grave reused in early Vendel Period. Three overlapping burials 11, 12 and 13 are also extremely interesting, as excavators noted possible traces of a destroyed stone setting next to burial 13 (Larsson 1981, 138). It seems that externally marked graves became focal points for later burials, similarly to older burial mounds – a practice often observed on Danish burial grounds from the Viking Age (Pedersen 2006, 350). In my opinion, the external marking and the meaning could have had drew people to create a connection to the older burial, or rather to ancestors or beings responsible for it. Space, understood as possessing some meaning and qualities, was the main reason for placing the dead in a particular cluster of burials, or even over the original burial. The practice was probably much more wide spread, but the agricultural character of southern Scandinavia (on the extent of the destruction see: Thäte 2007, 172–173), connected to crude, as compared to today's excavation methods obliterated its traces from the landscape.

The consideration for space of placing the grave can also be seen in the dimensions of a pit used for intersecting burial. At Önsvala, the pits both for burial 12 and 23 are extremely short and narrow, too small to contain the remains in a supine position, what probably forced the individuals responsible for the burial to place them in peculiar positions⁵¹. Two explanations, both pointing towards intentionality in the choice of burial place, are possible. One is that the external feature constrained physically the possibilities of placing a grave in or near it, influencing the unfavourable pit dimensions. The second explanation is that the concern with not visible structures and place of former burial was displayed, and the pit was intentionally small not to damage the older structure. The first possibility is more probable, as in both cases the older burial was damaged, however, in the case of burial 23 certain "respect" for older human remains was shown by re-depositing them in the burial. Burial A98 from Stävie also seems to display similar concerns with space in relation to older burials. The pit, cut across the older burial pit, was extremely short and narrow. The uncommon dimensions did not prevent the ritual participants from burying the individual in a container. In my opinion, this is the evidence of deliberate placing the burial over or in contact with older structures.

A-M. Hållans Stenholm views the overlays as practice that is transforming or making statements about the identity both of the person buried in the older burial and the person

⁵¹ In both cases it visibly was a primary deposition, and the whole bodies were intended to be placed in the pits.

being buried in the overlay. The practice, in her understanding, is both inscribing⁵² and incorporating⁵³ (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 217). The inscribing aspect of overlaying burials is widely accepted in medieval archaeology. The graves and monuments are viewed as statements about the genealogy of a person (Härke 2001, 12; Hållans Stenholm 2012, 217) and overlays are often perceived as means to display continuity and connection through kinship (Maldonado 2013, 26; Thäte 2007, 194). The importance of genealogy for inheritance purposes, and the role of the grave mounds containing a sequence of burials in this process was presented for the area of Central Sweden (Zachrisson 1994); and it is possible that the South-Scandinavian burials can be related to similar legal and social matters.

It feels necessary to emphasise the creative potential of this practice, in light of the nature of Early Medieval genealogies and kinship concepts. If the dead are perceived as still active component of the society, the funeral gives an opportunity to intervene and structure it in a new way. Through manipulation of the monument, the identity of the past deceased is altered, and new identity for the newly buried created. If, in fact, graves are partially memorials of past social identity of a dead person, their alteration can change it (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 218). Legitimation through kinship claims displayed at the grave monument should never lead to belief about actual biological kinship. As with sex and gender concept duality we need to abandon the link between socially understood kinship and biology, and move towards models where performative action is more important. The monuments, viewed as attempt to fix the social identities (Graham 2009, 52) are not immune to alteration, that has to take place as the process of identification and society construction goes on. Early Medieval genealogies were constructed with limited regards for actual biological proximity. It is tempting to think about possibility of bonding with the deceased, if it could serve current social needs. The past in the oral communities tends to be recalled selectively and with a large deal of “constructivism” to address the present-day problems (Brink 2005, 91; Back-Danielson 2007, 32). Adjustment of the monuments to reflect the current version might be one of the necessary steps through which social memory, serving as a template for society construction, could be produced.

The overlays also possess certain aspects that allow viewing them as incorporating practice (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 217). Through placing a burial over another, the space gains a new meaning and the older dead is now perceived in relation with the newer. The new burial could in fact, as the cases of reuse of the pit prove, remove and destroy the body. Even if the body was preserved, the new monument could destroy or significantly alter the old one, as it was “taken out of the circulation” as a piece of material culture. The meaning of place could be reoriented from displaying an individual identity towards collective one. In Old Norse societies, according to interpretation of written sources, ancestors were perceived as a source of power and wisdom (Back Danielson 2007, 249; Brendalmo & Røthe 1992, 107). Thäte views the elevated position as superior in the Old Norse societies, and interprets the practice of placing the grave over another as an expression of power (2009, 241). Authors often stress the relation of the farm and the burial ground in Central Swedish and Norwegian contexts. Is it possible that the changes in land ownership would be reflected as changes in “grave ownership”? The question is problematic for the South Scandinavia, where villages are

⁵² Inscribing practices are described as creating visible, tangible traces of authoritative and personal nature (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 217).

⁵³ Incorporating practices are described as practices leaving no material traces, related to body and ritual, that can involve a deliberate destruction of material culture or removing it from circulation (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 217).

believed to form a basic settlement unit, however, the legitimisation of land ownership can be one of the possible explanations of reuse and overlay of burials.

Another approach towards overlay burials draws on the idea that not all dead people were perceived as the same or equal, and measures to ensure successful transformation from a living member of society to the member of society of the dead were adjusted to the condition of the deceased (Kristoffersen & Oestigaard 2007; Maldonado 2013, 6). Interpretation of overlaying burials from Anglo Saxon cemetery at Sewerby uses the concept of how different dead could influence each other to secure the peace for the living. In the same grave, two women were buried as a result of two successive ceremonies. The lower burial was much more richly equipped and contained a body placed in a usual supine position. The upper burial was devoid of any grave goods and the woman was placed in prone position with bent legs and arms, indicating possible violent death. The contrast between the two burials has led H. Williams to propose that the “good” death of the lower individual was used to counter the “bad” death of the upper (Williams 2006, 97–100). The notion of benevolent influence of certain dead individuals should be regraded as possible explanation of the overlay burials or placing the graves in intersections.

2.3.6 Conclusion

Spatial location of the burial seems to have been of high importance during the Late Iron Age at Western Scanian cemeteries. The deliberate practice of intersecting or overlaying the burials could have different meanings in the process of society construction, varying from creating legitimisation through creating the continuity, to emphasising the break in it, and displaying the power over the dead and over the living. In the quest of meaning, which was probably dependant on the context of the situation in which the ritualised practice took place, it is possible to observe an important quality. The graves were not left in peace and they were employed in the interactions among the living and among the dead. The dynamic nature of social links transgressed death, as monuments and their content were employed in identity construction. The opening of graves and handling human remains was not perceived as transgression and played an important part in the ritualised practice.

2.4 Deposits of unburned human remains in the graves

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the preservation conditions at the sites make it difficult to understand the appearance of original deposits. In this chapter, graves that could be simultaneous double burials or result from deposition of parts of human skeletons in earlier graves will be discussed. The reason for including them in the discussion is the fact that they are often interpreted as signs of possible human sacrifice that took place at the funerals, which, according to F. Svanberg was a quite common occurrence on South-western Scanian burial grounds (2003b, 93). A different interpretation for the finds of scattered parts of human skeletons in the fills of inhumations has already been proposed. Here, more possible alternatives will follow, exploring the possibility that the remains, even these found in articulation, can be a result of at least two different types of events. A new perspective for the subject of simultaneous double burials will be also proposed.

2.4.1 Fragments of ancestors?

In three burials discovered at Stävie, remains of skulls of a second individual have been found. No other parts of the second skeleton were discovered or any other traces that can indicate the reuse of the burial pit, what can be explained by bad preservation of the bone material, or by the fact that just the skull was placed with the burial. In most of the cases, “additional” skulls are placed on a higher level in the fill of the pit than the actual burial. The exception is the burial A32 (appendix, fig. 43) where the better preserved skeleton with the head towards east is placed in a level around 20 cm higher than the skull found in the western part of the grave. According to excavators, it could be a simultaneously deposited double burial, judging from skeletal remains (Nagmér 1979, 25). Due to the fact that only skulls and some of the limb parts of the higher deposited skeleton were documented on the drawing, it is impossible to reach a conclusive interpretation.

In the burial A63 (appendix, fig. 45), over which a large circular pit was dug, the “additional” skull was placed around 50 cm over the skeletal remains buried in the bottom of the grave pit. It could indicate that the higher lying cranium was deposited after the pit was dug. However, it was found outside the boundaries of the younger feature, although not far from it, so a transfer caused by bioturbation is possible (Nagmér 1979, 37). If the deposition was simultaneous with the funeral, it would have to take place after the pit was partially filled.

In burial A80 (appendix, fig. 48), that was intersecting through burial A83 a fragment of a skull was found 7 cm above the bottom level of the grave, where the skeleton was placed. It was also near the boundary between two intersecting burial pits. Excavators interpreted it as “not placed in its original layer,” what can indicate that the fragment derived from one of the skulls from burials A80 or A83 and is not a separate deposit (Nagmér 1979, 49).

At Ljungbacka, in four graves remains from more than one skeleton were found, however, the condition of the finds makes it difficult to discuss the possibilities of simultaneous deposition of human body fragments in the graves during the funeral ceremonies.

In grave G7 (appendix, fig. 6), except a skeleton of an adult, teeth from a skeleton of a child were found. In the southern part of the pit, there are signs of disturbance caused by a later intrusion (Samuelsson 1998, 59). It is impossible to judge if the teeth are all that remained from a child's corpse, or they were intentionally deposited. The bodies of young individuals are more vulnerable to taphonomic factors (Lieverse et al. 2006, 1148). Samuelsson interpreted the burial as a simultaneous deposition (1998, 16).

In G21 (appendix, fig. 13), remains from skeletons of at least two adult individuals were found, however, their exact state of preservation or position in situ is unknown, since the burial was disturbed during the excavations (Samuelsson 1998, 60). The shape of damaged pit can, however, point towards conclusion that these were in fact two burials, in separate grave cuts.

In grave G28 (appendix, fig. 18), in the upper parts of the fill, human remains of an individual around 20 years old were found, separated by stone packing from a skeleton of another individual. The burial was not interpreted as simultaneous deposit by the excavator and the remains from the upper layers have been disturbed by earlier agricultural activity (Samuelsson 1998, 61). They are also very fragmentary and cannot point towards conclusion if a complete skeleton was placed in the upper layer of the burial.

At Norrvidinge, in the grave no. 16 (appendix, fig. 59) it is possible that more than two individuals were buried, as in two places in the burial human teeth were found, that might not

be associated with any of the two corpses. However, there is no published report describing the find conditions, which makes it impossible to interpret the burial.

In the fill of burials no. 15 (appendix, fig. 37) and 18 (appendix, fig. 38) from Råga Hörstad, parts of not cremated human skeleton were found but there are no information about what body part it was and where exactly it was located (Strömberg 1968, 20). Parts of human cranium were recovered from the fill of the possible chamber burial no. 6 (appendix, fig. 33) (Strömberg 1968, 10) and substantial parts of the human skeleton were found in the grave 2 (appendix, fig. 26), however, excavators were unsure if it was a reburial of older remains or a double grave (Strömberg 1968, 6). In the grave no. 3 (appendix, fig. 30), near its southern edge, a human mandible was found in the fill (Strömberg 1968, 7).

F. Svanberg interpreted all of the burials that contained possible signs of interment of more than one individual, and had indicators of status difference between the individuals as containing the remains of human sacrifice (2003b, 93). The amount of human remains was not a decisive factor, as well as indicators that could point towards the violent departing of at least one of the buried. Finds described above, containing only parts of “additional” humans, should not be interpreted according to this criteria. In the interpretation of evidence from Stävie taphonomic factors and post depositional disturbance have to be taken into account – then only burial A32 can in fact contain an additional body part or individual, that could be a result of simultaneous deposition. Further interpretive problems are connected to the approach towards the presence of human remains. Possibly, they should not be treated as remains of an individual that is buried, but as a substance adding to the transformation of the deceased or as elements of technology of remembrance, through which social memory and past is created (Williams 2006, 114–116). As the cremated remains are often seen as potentially used by the funeral participants in ceremonies (Oestigaard 2013, 500), there are no contradictions to treat the uncremated human remains in a similar way.

Through careful stratigraphical observations, Ulriksen proposed that human body parts were employed in funerary rituals on Zealand⁵⁴ (2011, 187). In many other burials from Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken and Trekroner Grydehøj human teeth have been recovered from the fills of the pits. Similar find is known from Dråby, where it was interpreted as remains of the skull of the buried slave (Ramskou 1965). Ulriksen interprets them as possible indications of depositions of human skulls, and the general frequent occurrence of cranial bones in the danish burials leads him to conclusion that possibly some sort of “head cult” might have existed during the Viking Age⁵⁵ (2011, 187).

The examples from Danish cemeteries, where the delayed in relation to funeral deposition of not cremated, disarticulated human remains is attested in the fills of the burial,

⁵⁴ The example might be the grave A583 at Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken where traces of a pit were found in which human remains had been deposited, in a manner which indicates that it could not have been the whole body (Ulriksen 2011, 187). Possibly, similar deposit could have been identified in burial A569 at the same site and burial A607 where the signs of digging a pit and parts of cranium were discovered in the fill of the burial (Ulriksen 2011, 205–215).

⁵⁵ The fact that bones are often recognised as human cranial fragments might be partially due to them being relatively easy to recognise, both in cremated and “natural” state. Other reason might be the durability of tooth enamel, which is the most resilient part of human skeleton. The fact that remains that were exposed to secondary burial decompose easier than the primary (Lieverse et al. 2006, 1149) can possibly lead to the situation when the primary buried skeletal remains are preserved in a relatively good condition, and only teeth remain from the secondary deposit. The burials from Stävie, which were used as analogy in Ulriksen’s work, cannot be used as such, because of the preservation conditions for human bone at the site. Moreover, some of the contexts from which skulls were recovered can point to unintentional deposition or transfer from other intersecting burial.

can point to the fact they had to be in a skeletonised state when buried. The time that is needed for soft tissue to decompose is usually estimated to be around two years in the moderate climate, however, it depends on many external and internal factors influencing the burial context (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 146). This means that the skeletonised body parts had to belong to people who had died some time before the ceremony and had to be stored somewhere.

Ulriksen views the human remains buried secondary in the fills of inhumation as a possible sign of ancestor worship, when special individuals were exhumed and deposited in burials of other individuals (2011, 188). Although the hypothesis cannot be proved, it is possible in light of the evidence of probably delayed deposition or re-deposition.

2.4.2 Simultaneous multiple burials

Two graves from Ljungbacka and two graves from Stävie can be interpreted as resulting from possible simultaneous deposition of two or more bodies. Most often, the reasons for simultaneous burial of many individuals are explained to be a catastrophe or results of a ceremony during which people were executed to be buried with the deceased. As long as the ligaments in the body are preserved, the corpses can be manipulated to be positioned in a manner that would indicate a simultaneous burial (Duday 2008, 75). Another factor worth considering is the possible time span between the death of the first individual, the death of the other buried individual, and the deposition. This might not be a simple linear sequence, if events like exhumation or post funeral depositions are taken into account.

At the site of Ljungbacka, in grave G23 (appendix, fig. 14) and grave G26A (appendix, fig. 16), simultaneous deposition of the remains was proposed (Samuelsson 1998, 15). Burial G23 had the corpses of probably two men positioned in a manner similar to earlier described successive double burial depositions – one man was buried over another. The person placed at the bottom of the pit was equipped with iron spurs, decorated with copper inlays, the person buried in the upper part of the fill was equipped with two knives and a wheat stone. The dead were buried, one with the head towards W-NW, and another would have had his head placed in opposing end of the grave, however, the skull of the upper individual might have been placed between his legs. Finds of cremation related material were also present in the grave. It is possible that the upper individual was decapitated. Unfortunately, the burial was damaged during the excavation. The fact that one individual might have displayed signs of being killed, has led to interpreting the burial as simultaneous (Samuelsson 1998; 2001, 93).

In the burial G26A two individuals were buried, over another grave G26B, and the relation between the two features is uncertain. There is a difference between the positions of the buried men, placed in the irregular pit of the upper burial. One, fragmentarily preserved, was probably buried in a supine position, while the second one, preserved in relatively good condition, was buried in a prone position with slightly bent lower limbs and left hand raised and also bent, while the right one was positioned along the torso. The orientation of the corpse is also “inverted” in comparison to fragmentary remains placed next to it. The skeleton placed on the stomach was identified as belonging to an older man, probably around 50 – 60 years old, and traces of possible sharp force trauma to his skull were identified (Samuelsson 2001, 93–94). In this case, the burial was also identified as a result of a single event (Samuelsson 1998, 15). In my opinion, this interpretation is questionable.

The remains placed on a same level in the same pit are often viewed as deposited at the same time (Arcini & Jacobsson 2008, 7). The difference in preservation of the remains is striking. The fragmentarily preserved skeleton was identified as belonging to an adult individual, and the better preserved one belonged to an elder person. This does not conform to observations that skeletons of older individuals are more affected by the decomposition than the younger, because of lower mineral bone density (Lieverse et al. 2006, 1148). The irregular pit outline is also interesting, as the areas near corpses seems to be dug exactly to accommodate the bodies. It is possible that these were in fact two intersecting burials, and the decomposition fluids have attracted the earthworms that spread the darker organic discolouration, resulted in blurring of their edges and created an impression of a single pit. The damage to the underlying burial 26b can also point that the space had in fact witnessed three separate burial actions.

At Stävie, the burial A32 (appendix, fig. 43) might be a result of simultaneous deposition, but it is hard to judge if it was a simultaneous deposition of two corpses or just a deposition or reduction of disarticulated human remains, since only the skull was present from lower positioned skeleton, or at least it was the only remain that was documented in the drawing. The excavators interpreted the burial as simultaneous deposition of two bodies, one with the head towards east and another with the head towards west (Nagmér 1979, 25).

Another probable burial that involved deposition of bodies of at least three individuals was discovered in burial A85 (appendix, fig. 49). There, two human skulls were discovered in the northern part of the grave, and another one in its southern end. The excavators noted, except the cranial bones, only the discolouration connected to some parts of postcranial skeletons of the individuals. Because all of the skulls were deposited roughly at the same level, the grave was interpreted as a result of simultaneous deposition of three bodies (Nagmér 1979, 55).

Double or mass graves have been discussed in the Scandinavian archaeology for a long time. The question of simultaneous or successive deposition led researchers to discussion about the phenomenon of human sacrifice as an element of funerary rituals. Three southern Scandinavian graves are often referred to when this interpretation is proposed.

The first of the graves that could already be seen as a classic example is burial 55 from Lejre on Zealand. There, in a pit oriented on axis E-W, two skeletons were found, one placed over another. The upper skeleton was buried in a prone position and had shown signs of decapitation – there were visible cut marks on his third cervical vertebra. According to the most popular interpretation of the grave, the individual's hands and feet were tied. Underneath the decapitated individual, another skeleton, buried in supine position, was found. It was equipped with a knife, a whetstone and bronze belt buckle (Wulf Andersen 1995, 14).

Another “classic” example of the grave interpreted as containing a human sacrifice is the grave no. 2 from Stengade on Langeland. There, in one pit, possibly a chamber grave, skeletons of two men placed next to each other were found. Both were placed on their back, and one of them was possibly decapitated (although there are no signs of cutting on the bones) and, according to the excavators, his hands were tied. Possibly a spear was placed on both corpses, running diagonally through the grave (Skaarup 1980, 5).

The third grave was found at Gredurp on Zealand. In a large pit filled with cut turf, two skeletons were discovered, placed on their back. One, of a man, was buried in a position with unusually bent legs, the second was a skeleton of a woman on which three large stones had been placed. Because of displacement of the cervical vertebrae, the male skeleton was

perceived as a victim of hanging, and the strange position of his legs could indicate that they were tied (Christensen & Bennike 1983, 9–11).

From Scania, one possible grave including a human sacrifice is known from Fjälkinge (Samuelsson 1998, 14). There, the skeleton found bore signs of decapitation, the skull placed in the pelvic region, the lower part of the lower leg was missing and some of its bones were discoloured through burning. The skeleton was placed over another burial (Strömberg 1961b, 67). There were no stratigraphic observations noted and the simultaneous deposition of the remains is questionable. Also the extent of damage done to the upper skeleton seems unusual.

All the above described burials had been interpreted as burials containing an executed slave and the master. In my opinion, it is necessary to include some field anthropological observation into interpretation of these contexts.

The first issue that can be observed in the three Danish burials is the problem of traces of limb binding. In none of the burials were any physical traces of binding material discovered. The proximity of limbs next to each other does not have to result from binding the body. In that case the fact of tying the limbs should not be viewed as proven (for a similar problem with the mesolithic burials see: Nilsson Stutz 2003, 296).

The additional problem is tracing the evidence of deliberate execution. The marks related to decapitation of a skeleton were only discovered in the burial 55 from Lejre. These mean that the man, whose head had been cut off, was buried in a grave with another. There is no possibility of reconstructing in what kind of event this damage was done to the body. A burial most similar to the one from Lejre is known from Kumle Høje, where individuals were placed in a similar position, but both were probably decapitated. They were interpreted as victims of an execution, possibly criminals (Kjær Kristiansen & Bennike 2001, 13; Thäte 2009, 268).

In the case of Stengade burial and the burial from Gerdrup, there are problems with interpreting the space of decomposition in the burial contexts. In Stengade II it was probably a chamber grave, providing enough space for the displacement of the head, that might have followed from decomposition of non-persistent ligaments of cervical vertebrae. The same kind of displacement is probably traceable with Gerdrup individual, and could be caused by any “pocket” of secondary external empty space behind the cervical column. On both of the sides of the woman clear wall effect is visible that can be connected to the restrains from a narrow container or wrapping. The stones that were discovered on the body had probably been placed on the lid of a narrow coffin or on a shroud. If there was a larger container or a chamber present, it would explain the unusual position of man’s legs that would be probably be bent in the knees and placed with knees and feet together. The later process of decomposition would influence of the falling of the semi-decomposed legs in the empty space to the lateral sides of the body. The feet, placed on the ground, would not be affected by the gravitation and would remain in proximity.

Samuelsson viewed both of the “additional” individuals in graves G23 and G26A as being killed (2001, 93), however, in both cases it might be questionable. In grave 26A, the osteological report concluded that the sharp force trauma to the skull might have caused the death of the individual, but it is also possible that it was a damage done during excavations (Samuelsson 1998, 15). In the grave 23, the fact that the skeletal remains were disturbed have influenced the original position of the skull in the burial.

The purely archaeological traces of human sacrifices, or rather sacrifices of a slave, have to be described as inconclusive and it is necessary to examine why this interpretation is

still so popular. In my opinion, it is related to the very “graphical” descriptions of the funeral ceremonies known from the written sources.

2.4.3 A slave or just a means to an end? Interpreting “the additional dead”

Traditionally, inspired by the description of funeral ceremony witnessed by Ibn Fadlan in the area of present-day Russia, double graves, where a certain difference of status between individuals was implied, were interpreted as a burial of a master with a slave to accompany him to the afterlife (Anderson 1960, 26; Hemmendorf 1984, 7; Ramskou 1965, 86; Samuelsson 1998, 15). The slave in that case was supposed to signify the wealth of the family that was able to afford such an extravagant act as a human sacrifice (Samuelsson 1998, 15).

There are convincing arguments against this interpretation. In Arabic sources, a term that describes the girls who are sacrificed at the funeral ceremonies is *jaria*, what can mean a concubine, servant or a slave. To complicate the matter further, the same term is used to describe the old woman who kills the girl in the Ibn Fadlan's account of Rus funeral (Petrukhin 2007, 67). The Arabic sources, describing the sacrifice of wives or servants are employed to interpret burials on territories from Lofoten in Norway to Denmark and from Russia to Manx, without any consideration for possible regional variations.

The graves are located at rural cemeteries, that might be interpreted as belonging to peasant communities, and as such are not a fitting place for a burial of a chieftain but it must be noted that there are no burials found that indicate a large demonstration of wealth in south-west Scania (Nielsen 1991, 261). Samuelsson stressed the fact that the burials with the probable human sacrifice are among the best equipped at the Ljungbacka cemetery (1998, 15). The burials from Stävie do not differ from the others discovered at the site. The burials are still quite modestly equipped compared to surrounding regions, and examining them as a part of a broader horizon, together with the Danish examples, might point to conclusion that the difference of status between the upper deceased and the lower one (who is most often interpreted as the “master”) is not really big. Nielsen proposed an interpretation of the burials as the ones of ritual specialist, buried with their assistants, however, he did not produce convincing evidence to support his idea (1991, 261).

The lower status of the “accompanying” burial can also be questioned, paradoxically on the basis of the new research that claims to confirm it. In two double burials from Flakstad on Lofoten in Norway a complete skeleton and a decapitated one were found. All the artefacts retrieved from the burials were very modest. The analysis of stable isotopes from the remains found in before mentioned burials, as well as other eight found on the site, has been conducted. It is established that seven individuals, including the decapitated ones, were living on a diet that included mostly marine source of protein. The same diet was confirmed for two samples taken from dog remains. Three individuals buried in two double and one mass grave displayed a different dietary history, with higher terrestrial protein intake (Nauman et al. 2014, in press). The results were interpreted as displaying a difference in a rank between people buried intact and the decapitated ones. This seems to be a reasonable interpretation, however, the researchers have clearly stressed a lack of difference between the decapitated people and people buried in single burials that contained some grave goods, what did not stop them from labelling the decapitated individuals as slaves, on the basis of the questionable evidence of their intentional killing during the burial ceremony (Nauman et al. 2014, in press). The fact that the slave status is not necessary to be sacrificed or executed

was observed by many scholars, and seems to contradict the research results (Randsborg 1984, 155; Wilson 2008, 34).

One way of escaping those problems is to acknowledge the theoretical developments in the mortuary archaeology. All the interpretations above still have a tendency to try to “read” the graves in a futile chase of individual social persona displayed through graves goods and burial methods, continuing the ideas of Lewis Binford (Ekengren 2006, 109; Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 7; Oestigaard 2006, 10f) or sometimes acknowledging the agency of the descendants but treating it only in lines of expression of wealth and social rank. Acknowledging funerals as ceremonies where a new being is created, that dissolves the boundaries between objects, animals and humans used in the burial (Back-Danielson 2007, 267–268; Williams 2001, 206) opens new interpretative possibilities. In light of these conceptions, the human sacrifice is just a part of a larger event, where the actual deceased, after transformation, can be seen as the thing or person actually received by gods or ancestors (Oestigaard 2000, 43). Following this theory, the “additional” body should be viewed as a materialisation of a ritual practice, a part of “spiritual technology” (Back-Danielson 2007, 265), not a grave good expressing the status (contra: Samuelsson 2001, 95).

If the funeral ceremony contained an element of killing someone, his post-mortem status as a person of a lower standing might be assumed, since this person could be seen as being objectified, however, this event alone does not convey any evidence about the person’s social standing during his life. In light of the observation that the Viking Age burial grounds are hardly large enough to serve the entire population, it might be fruitful to switch the focus from the “primary” individual to the “additional” person.

Ceremonies that took place on cemeteries could be perceived as a privilege and possible desirable transformative event in the life course of an individual (for similar views regarding possible rebirth as a person of higher status see: Petrukhin 2007, 68). Possibly, for certain people the only way of receiving this kind of treatment was to be executed and buried with another person. In our views, where the death is a departure from the world of the living and an undesirable event, the decision to die during someone’s funeral seems irrational (for a criticism on applying modern understanding of rational to past societies, on the example of silver hoards see: Urbańczyk 2009b). If the modern concepts of rationality, inapplicable to studies of past mentalities are disregarded it is possible to abandon the notion of oppression related to interpretations of double burials. It is extremely interesting, that individuals buried in chamber/boat grave at Hedeby are never interpreted as a slave and a master, but rather as a Lord and his cup bearer (Staecker 2005, 6). It seems that elements stressing inequality and violence are downplayed when the grave equipment is discovered in connection to both bodies in the double burial. The grave goods are still treated as direct reflection of rank achieved during life, not as implements necessary to perform a ritualised action. Concentration on doubtfully accurate for the whole area descriptions from historical sources still keeps archaeology in a role of provider of examples and illustrations to narrations written over 1000 years ago.

2.4.4 Conclusions

Investigating the use of not cremated human remains in Viking Age burials is obscured by problems related to the quality of the archaeological source material. Observations are mostly derived from old excavations where evidence critical for understanding the nature of

the deposit was either obliterated by excavation methods or is untraceable because of the preservation conditions. The body parts appearing in graves should be understood contextually, and although it is probably impossible to learn where they originated from, I am certain that conceptualising their possible origins other than a freshly killed slave can only benefit the research. Viewing a burial as a result of a single course of action is not congruent with South-western Scanian evidence – the deposition of body parts could be delayed in time

Looking at the grave through the ideas of it being the outcome of intentional, ritualised process, it can be doubted if ranks should be discussed, as a new identity for the dead is created. The whole individuals or parts of them were used as implements in performative action employed in the process of society creation; it is possible that they should be viewed more in terms of substance with certain transformative qualities than representations of acts of power. Through acts of burial or re-burial connections might have been created between different dead members of society, but probably also among the living. On the one hand, some bodies become objectified during the interpretative process (“slaves” in burials), while others retain their individuality (body parts as proofs of possible double burials). Interpretations other than uncritically received descriptions from written sources should be considered. It seems that handling human remains and encounters with the dead were a common theme in ceremonies taking place at western Scanian burial grounds.

2.5 Signs of post-depositional interaction with the burial context

The previous chapter has demonstrated that there is a possibility that the human remains in skeletonised state were employed in rituals that took place on South-western Scania cemeteries. In this chapter, signs of interaction with the burial context that might have provided the living with access to the dead bodies will be traced through analysis of stratigraphy of the burials. However, as I base my interpretation on documentation by the original excavations, the results should be treated with caution. Interpretation of archaeological layers goes beyond simple observation of discolourations, other factors, accessible only to the excavator, are also relevant. In theory, the intrusions can be traced as darker, more organic discolourations visible on the surface of the grave pit or in its profile (Aspöck 2011, 302), however, the disturbances done to the grave short after burial might be harder to trace. Other possible indicators of opening of the burials are parts of the burial equipment deposited in the fills and deposited fragments of human and animal remains. The destruction noticeable in internal grave structures and alterations of the position of the skeleton can be related to those processes (Aspöck 2011, 320).

At Ljungbacka, grave G7 (appendix, fig. 6) was disturbed by a later pit in its southern part. However, this event seems to be unrelated to the content of the grave. Into the grave G22 a later pit is cutting. Grave G15 (appendix, fig. 8) had shown clear evidence of re-opening, however, this event cannot be clearly dated.

At Önsvala, in the northern part of the grave 21 possibly a pit was dug, as the bottom of the burial seems to be uneven. The situation is hard to interpret, as the burial is cutting through and older one, dated to Vendel Period (Larsson 1981, 114). If in fact the pit was partially re-opened, the five large stones placed over the interacting grave must postdate this action, as it would be impossible to dig a pit with them in a way.

At Stävie, burial A18 (appendix, fig. 41) shows possible signs of re-opening. Human remains seem to be scattered at the bottom of the pit and in the profile drawing distinct

layers are visible in the fill of the burial (Nagmér 1979, 16). Possibly, a pit was also dug in the fill of A20. The irregular outline of the pit and discolourations visible in the profile (Nagmér 1979, 18) point towards this interpretation. Over the burial A63 (appendix, fig. 45) a roughly circular pit A62 was located, cutting into its upper layers; next to the edge of the later feature a human skull was located (Nagmér 1979, 37). In the burial A187 (appendix, fig. 53), discolouration of the fill was observed that could be a trace of a pit (Nagmér 1979, 73). The examples from Stävie are difficult to interpret, since the preservation of the bone material at the site was bad. Traces connected to disarticulations of the skeletons are hard to observe, as well as eventual traces of removing of different body parts.

At Norrvidinge, the burial 21 (appendix, fig. 62) was damaged in its southern part, however, it is unknown whether it was related to another burial or other type of feature, or it was an excavation accident. In grave 72, that was not dated to the Viking Age, there are visible signs of opening of the pit, while the wooden coffin was still preserved enough to have its vertical walls in position. The grave 55 (appendix, fig. 65) was covered by an irregular layer that was cutting into the original grave pit. Covered by it, was a spearhead thrust vertically into the original fill of the burial. The act of thrusting the object into the grave must have preceded covering it by the layer that exceeds the regular outline of the burial pit.

At Råga Hörstad, in the fills of most of the burials ceramic fragments, skeletal remains of both human and animals and other debris like pieces of burned clay were discovered. Similar evidence discovered at Winhill in England, on Anglo Saxon cemetery, dated to the 7th and 8th c., was interpreted as a possible sign that the graves were not fully filled, and the material was mixed during the process of natural refilling of the graves (Aspöck 2011, 315). From Swedish site there is no information of finds of snail shells⁵⁶, which are crucial to understanding the process, this, however, can be caused by the omission of ecofacts from the descriptions. The possibility that the burial might have been re-opened has to be considered, however, even though the documentation drawings do not provide any indication of distinct layers in the fill of the burial that could prove such activities. There are three exceptions, the possible chamber grave no. 6⁵⁷ and the two burials covered by the same layer – graves 11 and 10 (Strömberg 1968, 13).

Traces of features cutting into the burials have been observed on Zealand. Deposits of skeletonised human remains were discussed in the previous chapter. Possibly grave A590 from Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken was re-opened and then gradually filled with stones, fragments of human skeletons and artefacts. The problematic notion is the radically different dating observed between fragments of animal bones dated by AMS C14 dating, and artefacts and the skeleton buried at the bottom of the feature, that was also carbon dated. The material seems to have a span of around 150 years⁵⁸ (Ulriksen 2011, 209–210). Most likely, the mixed deposit should be viewed as gradually formed or as a mix of artefacts and human remains that could end up in the grave during filling in of the burial. Other possibilities include the re-use of the pit of a burial from the end of the 8th c. by burial from the 10th c. A

⁵⁶ The snail species can be identified, some of them are unable to bury themselves, by recording their position in the fills of the burial, it is possible to prove that the burial had to be opened for them to be deposited there (Aspöck 2013, 309).

⁵⁷ The difference might be caused by the fact that the burial was probably overlaying an older burial (Strömberg 1968, 10).

⁵⁸ A glass bead dated to the end of Merovingian period/beginning of the Viking Age; a fragment of gilded brooch dated to the end of the 8th c., an animal bone, dated by AMS to 900–1000, from the bottom of the feature; another animal bone, dated to 775–875; the skull of the buried woman dated to 984–1018.

pit was dug in the grave A607 from the same site, except the more recent disturbance that was observed by finds of bricks and porcelain (Ulriksen 2011, 211).

Traces of pits placed over burials are known from a different site on Langeland. Over the grave AAF from Bogøvej a large pit was dug, that destroyed a major part of it (Grøn et al. 1994, 21). Some of the skeletal remains seem to be redeposited close to the original grave pit, but other probably decomposed or were taken away. From Kaagården an interesting burial, interpreted as “plundered grave,” is known. In burial AØ only lower parts of legs of the skeleton were found. Over the grave, the pit that was used to access the burial was documented. Some of the skeletal remains were found in the vicinity of the grave and in the “plundering hole” but most of the skeleton was gone (Grøn et al. 1994, 94).

At Køstrup on Fyn, a small pit was dug in the southern part of burial ACQ. It was interpreted by the excavators as a sign of external marking of the grave (Lindblom 1993, 143).

Possibly, more burials that were excavated in the past displayed signs of interactions of the living with the burial context, but older research seemed to be mostly concerned with the content of the grave, not the traces of actions that could be observed by analysis of the fills of the burial and the pit shapes (Aspöck 2011, 320). Probably, large amounts of fragmentarily preserved artefacts discovered in the fill of the burials at Trekrøner Grydehøj and Kirke Hyllinge Kirkebakken (Ulriksen 2011, 197–200) can be partially related to this kind of delayed deposition in the opened pits. There, the evidence of breaking into or opening the graves is less obvious than in western Scandinavia, but still the above presented examples clearly show that this practice occurred in southern Scandinavia.

2.5.1 Interpreting the interference

Usually the intrusions into the burials had been explained as driven by the desire to improve one’s economic situation (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 85; Aspöck 2011, 300–302). This idea seems to be inapplicable to burials in South-western Scania, where the grave goods are usually quite modest. Nevertheless the desire to retrieve items out of the burial could be caused by reasons other than economics. One possible idea is that the graves were broken into to get hold of items perceived as invested with special powers, either inherently, or from the fact that along their “biography” they were buried with a certain person (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 85).

An interesting interpretation was proposed by Aspöck for the signs of plundering visible in a large number of Merovingian sites from continental Europe. Following the ideas that the funerary ritual was mainly concerned with display of wealth during the ceremony, she proposed that the tombs were later opened to retrieve the valuables, that have already served their purpose (Aspöck 2011, 313). It is tempting to consider this reasoning as an explanation for the modest appearance of graves in South-western Scania, however, the evidence provided by the older research is not sufficient to support or disprove this hypothesis.

The action of retrieving items from burials might have also had important symbolic overtones, except economic benefits. Written sources from the continent and Iceland provided interesting examples of heroes and kings “interacting” with the dead. For example, according to Paulus Diaconus Longobardian Duke Giselpert of Verona entered the tomb of Alboin, the king who had led the tribe to Italy and retrieved some of items buried there, including his sword. According to the Early Medieval author through this action he tried to

convince the ignorant people that he had met with the King. The act of obtaining items, that pointed toward interaction with the dead who was important for the whole community provided legitimisation for the actions of the living individual. Similar episodes are described in Icelandic sagas. One example, described in *Porðar Saga Hreðu* took place on Zealand. Skreggi, the hero, broke into the burial mound of the king Hrolf Krakis at Lejre and retrieved his sword. Generally, the dead were described as reluctant to part with their wealth in the stories (Geary 1994, 63–66), and the fact that the living had to battle the “undead” could be seen as bringing the additional valour to the deed (Thäthe 2009, 85).

The fact that the human remains had been disturbed in many cases in the Norwegian examples of “plundered” burial mounds (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 91), as well as in the graves known from Langeland in Denmark, has led some researchers to conclusion that actually the bones of certain individuals could be the target (Back Danielson 2007, 247). The remains might have been re-used in different rituals, as it was proposed in the previous chapter, or reworked into artefacts, for example as temper in pottery or used for carbonisation of steel (Gansum 2007, 138).

Often the action against the dead who disturbed the peace of the living is proposed as the reason why the burials were re-opened and bodies manipulated, this interpretation based on the western Scandinavian medieval literature (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 98; Gansum 2008, 142-144). Possibly, the grave 55 from Norrvidinge can be seen as an example of such an apotropaic action, as spearhead plunged into the grave was interpreted as sign of preventive measures against undead by Artelius on the basis of the discovery at Dalstorp, where five spearheads were piercing cremation layer of a burial of a woman (Artelius 2009, 36–37). Interpreting continental examples Aspöck views also the post-mortem beheading as a possible way of stopping the undead (2011, 313). As the traces of decapitation are often treated as a sign of execution in the context of Scandinavian burials, application of this interpretation to explain the appearance of certain burial contexts might be fruitful.

Since the dead should be viewed as still continuing their existence and playing a crucial role in the society, destruction of their bodies should be also perceived as an attack against community or an individual who has established social relations with them. A similar interpretation was proposed for the action of breaking into Norwegian burial mounds, but there the body of the chieftain was perceived as a source of power (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 107). I would propose a different approach towards this problem. If the power was constructed by the social relations both with the living and the dead, the attacks against the “dead” members of the network would equally prove the person higher in hierarchy as weak, exactly like in the case of living people (Hermanson 2011, 71).

Interaction with the corpses, that could result in breaking into the burial cannot be driven only by the desire to harm the dead. One of the most famous examples of an action probably directed towards helping the ancestor is the possible transition of the corpses from the northern mound at Jelling in Jutland to the church at the same site (for description, with criticism of the concept see: Staecker 2005, 12; also described in: Roesdahl 1997, 236). A similar integrating practice could be building of churches over older burials, known from continental Europe (Geary 1994, 38). A church was erected over a Viking Age burial of a woman at Hørning in Denmark. The burial mound was levelled and the building was built, probably in the 11th c. (Roesdahl 1997, 240-243). However, these practices should be seen in the same light as overlays of burials, as destructive and creative at the same time. They could be driven by the will to integrate and show continuity on the one hand, and by the desire to destroy and dominate the pagan cult on the other.

The grave mounds, and possibly grave sites, were considered the places where the living could contact the dead, in light of the west-Scandinavian medieval literature and provincial laws (Back Danielson 2007, 250; Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 97; Gansum 2008, 144; Thäte 2011, 118). The actions connected to different ritualised practice have involved exhumation and damaging the body, as suggested by a rune stone from Eggja in Norway (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 92)

It is also possible that traces of disturbances were caused not by the action of reducing the grave content, but by adding new deposits. In the previous chapter deposition of possible skeletonised human remains was discussed, on basis of evidence from Zealand (Ulriksen 2011, 188). From prehistoric mounds in Sweden and Denmark, deposits of silver were recovered (von Heijne 2007, 151), what is an indication that things could be added to the older burial contexts. No similar deposits were discovered in graves described in this paper, however it is possible that there could be offerings of food or other non-durable goods deposited in the recorded pits.

2.5.2 Conclusion

The evidence of re-opening the grave or digging pits in the grave fill is difficult to examine. The phenomena was not treated as significant and many possible traces could have been ignored. The comparative material, derived from other Scandinavian areas points towards high probability of people interacting with the burial context after the initial deposition. It is possible that during these interaction human remains were retrieved from the burial contexts to be redeposited elsewhere. The practice might have also been directed towards obtaining items that could legitimise the person as worthy of power or otherwise alter his social status. Possibly, some of the actions were directed against the dead who were believed to disrupt the social order. Whatever was the meaning of these actions, it is necessary to recognise the fact that the graves were used (Back Danielson 2007, 259; Ulriksen 2011, 200). They were not places created during a single action and left in the undisturbed state. There are far less differences between settlement structures and grave monuments and the approach towards burials as closed deposits might be misleading. In current, practice-oriented archaeology, more flexible definitions and less rigid categorisations are necessary. All of the meanings proposed for the practice are related to construction of society – bringing the peace by removing troubling dead, obtaining legitimacy to a certain position or challenging someone's power by destroying the dead related to his identity – all of these actions are related to transformation of social identity of the living.

3. Conclusion

3.1 No rest for the ancestors

The short overview of South-western Scanian cemeteries proves that the graves should not be treated as a static context (Back Danielson 2007, 269–270). They are employed in and created by dynamic social interaction. The agency in the creation of the monument was mostly on the side of the living, as the dead was unable to carry out any intentional action (Ekengren & Nilsson Stutz 2009, 6). It does not mean that the dead body does not possess any agency, as it acts as a focal point towards projected concepts (Williams 2004, 265) and possesses certain material qualities (Nilsson Stutz 2008, 22). I find it important to emphasise that it is the living who in fact makes the choices of how to conduct the funeral (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 29; Williams 2008, 261).

The choice was probably limited by the institutionalised ideas about what is proper, limiting the extent of possible performative action to the “citations” of actions performed before, however, the structure was open towards manipulation and gradual change, as can be seen by the appearance of burial goods probably related to the Jelling dynasty. It is important to recognise that items like pendants, brooches, axes and wagon cases were probably available to inhabitants of western Scania throughout the Late Iron Age, but it was not until they had to be employed in the act of creating society under the rule of the Jelling kings, that they made their presence known on the burial grounds. Through the reception of new meanings, communicated by the king and the court the new positional meaning could be created for the items during funerary rituals. The performance, drawing on real-life situations, had to adapt to the expectations of the participants. The political situation in the 10th c. might have influenced the Danish burial customs, as that was the time of the highest number of older monument re-uses (Thäte 2009, 209) and the highest variation in the burial customs (Kleinminger 1993, 144). The time of the society construction on the new principles might be reflected by elaboration of the burial practices, whether connected to claims for legitimacy by the new powers, or as a certain demarcator of stress by the old.

In South-western Scania, the mourners probably had executed their agency already through the act of choosing who will receive a funeral. The restricted demography, similar to Early Medieval Scotland (Maldonado 2013, 27) points to conclusion that funeral was an exclusive practice. The ceremony itself has to be seen as action that employed elements of transformation of the dead person (Back-Danielsson 2007, 250; Ekengren 2006, 109; Mansurd 2006; 133; Oestigaard 2000, 42; Oestigaard 2006, 17; Williams 2008, 240) – more of a rite of passage, not a departure (Ekengren 2013, 177). The time spent in the grave, as a transformed ancestor, should be perceived as another life stage in the existence of an individual. The actual biography ends with the imminent falling into oblivion. Notions of the dead, living in and outside their graves are well-known from Old Icelandic literature and other medieval sources (Back Danielson 2007, 249; Carlie 2006, 209; Gansum 2008, 142). It seems probable that similar notions of continuity of the existence after death were present in South-western Scania and were partially the reason for the interaction of the living with the burial contexts.

Since identity is displayed in large measure through practice (Casella & Fowler 2007, 7–8), the lack of intentional agency of the dead forces the participants to “perform” on behalf

of the deceased, and create an identity for him, by employment of material culture (Ekengren 2006, 110). The dead person can be seen as responsible or even directing the whole process (Williams 2004, 265), but in reality this is just a projection and an attempt to provide external legitimacy for mourners' conscious action.

The relatively modest burial goods – including knives and whetstones should not be viewed as just “daily objects” (Kleinminger 1993, 138) or simply the evidence that the corpses were buried clothed. The inclusion or exclusion of items in the grave is a result of the action of the mourners' action and their meaning might not be related to their function (Ekengren 2013, 182). In the Scanian context, possibly also human remains should be understood similarly to objects, since inclusion of cremation-related material and “additional” not cremated body parts seems to be a common practice. Employing Turner's ideas of positional meaning of symbols (Ekengren 2013, 182) saying that they should not be seen as representations of individuals, they were buried with, rather as tools employed in the ritualised action with the purpose of transforming the mourners' and deceased's identity. Human bones should be viewed as possessing a form of social agency through their relation to monuments, places, bodies of the living (and the dead) and artefacts (Williams 2004, 267). It is important to consider their social influence through concepts of bones as substance that might have possessed certain qualities for the mourners (Fowler 2001, 50–52). Human remains can be tied to social memories of persons or events (Williams 2006, 114–116) and their use during the funerals of other people might represent a desire to create a connection to those people or times.

Social identity is a process (Jenkins 2004, 17–18) that is created by a network of social relations between people (Graham 2009, 52; Oestigaard 2007, 14). The fact that the deceased was entering a new existence stage through the transformation affected the whole society that needed to be constructed again. This situation allows for alteration of the social position of ritual participants and towards this result the efforts of attendants were directed (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 29). The concepts of bilateral, dynamic, constructed and strategically employed kinship (Magnúsdóttir 2008, 42; Varenius 1998, 19; Vogt 2010, 11–12), proposed for the periods before the introduction of Canon-law-based concepts in the provincial laws in Scandinavia (Vogt 2010, 15) seems to create perfect conditions for legitimising and power creating performances at the funerals. The ideas that kinship performance was a deliberate strategic action are not new (Nielsen 1991, 247), however, this interpretation was only used to examine well-equipped burials as ways of claiming inheritance and providing legitimation to ruling over land. Power relations are present at all levels of any society and every individual is entangled in heterarchy of statuses. Each person was bound by horizontal and vertical ties (Varenius 1998, 23), and the amount and quality of them were decisive in different social situations in which a threat of violence or a power influence was necessary. The social networks probably included ancestored beings, residing at the cemeteries (Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008, 4), causing that the interaction, often displayed often by alterations of the burial context, was necessary. The graves, as monuments, should be viewed as attempts to fix and communicate the social identity of the living in relation to the dead (and through this to other living). However, due to processual nature of social identities and social memory (Graham 2009, 51–54) they are bound to undergo “adjustments” to respond to current needs in the process of social construction. In South-western Scania these adjustments can be traced in archaeological record by studies of overlaying burials, monument reuse and signs of affecting the burial context.

The communicative aspect of the grave should be emphasised by the fact that it shares the Old Norse name *Kuml* (meaning “sign”) with other monumental feature – the rune

stone (Back Danielson 2007, 152; Stoklund 1991, 287). Run stones' function is deciphered differently, they are viewed as documents of land ownership, legislations of inheritance or just as monuments and memorials (Stoklund 1991, 295–296). I would argue that the fact that the analogous name might result from the fact that both graves and rune stones were to be understood, in the context of their location in landscape, as carriers of messages and identities anchored in the social memory, whose recollection was triggered by their form and content. Both types of monuments are located in places implying a concern with their visibility (Beck-Danielson 2007, 158–159). Judging from some of the inscriptions both rune stones and graves were treated as something that should remain unaltered (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 93; Stoklund 1991, 297). From the extent of manipulation of graves and transfer of rune stones to other locations, it is clear seen that there were exceptions to this rule. Back-Danielson interprets rune stones and grave mounds as places where contact between this and outer world could be established (2007, 167). This interpretation excessively stresses the division between living and the dead, which should not be viewed as so radical. Both kinds of monuments should be seen as a mnemonic device, carrying much information that is now beyond our reach, since it was forgotten.

Based on analysis of the sources from continental Europe, P. Geary views the dead in the early Middle Ages as engaged in reciprocal gift giving relations with the living. The dead provided the living with property (through inheritance), life and personal identity (Geary 1994, 78; Williams 2006, 26). In my opinion, ancestor beings were bestowing similar gifts on South-western Scanian population. In return, the identity of the ancestors was retained through ritual activities and memory, stretching their existence to the limit of social remembrance. On the social level, grave monuments and grave fields should be viewed as important places where society is constructed, and the power negotiated (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, 46).

Control over such powerful places was crucial in attempts at controlling the society. The changes implemented through Christianisation process, supported by the royal dynasty in Denmark, took away the control over the practice away from the communities. The church in cooperation with the king dictated where the dead should be buried, as well as how and who will be allowed on the cemetery. Through control over land donations and the tradition of *memoriae*, the command was placed also over the attempts to aid or contact the deceased part of society, who now resided far beyond the reach of profane population (Hållans Stenholm 2012, 234). In the 12th c., the king gained even further influence issuing the regulations about how the land should be inherited (Vogt 2008, 274). In the provincial laws from Norway, there are severe punishments for any kind of practice that could be perceived as an attempt to contact the ancestors (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, 98). People were supposed to be no longer connected to the ancestors, as the power base shifted, and the honours and titles should be gained through the King. The power of the leader himself was not derived from his people (including the dead) as it was the case with chieftains, but from the transcendent Christian God (Hermanson 2011, 77). The dead were finally laid to rest.

3.2 Practice based theoretical approach – the consequences for excavation methodology

Mortuary archaeology achieved major theoretical breakthroughs via reorienting itself from the quest for meaning and abstract symbolism to studies of traces of past practices. To

see “what” and “how” people did can provide valuable insight into past mentalities, which has been the attempt of this thesis. To trace the past practices, the archaeological source material needs to be of certain quality. Understanding of a grave as a structured deposit (Ekengren 2013, 174) makes it necessary to abide to certain guidelines during the fieldwork, so that the sequence of action can be interpreted. It is a truism to state that the complexity of reality is not reducible to any form of documentation (Whitmore 2007, 554–555), but I find it important to state that we now possess tools that can better inform us about past practices. The first rule would be not to assume that the fill of the burial forms one stratigraphic unit. It should be removed in a manner that allows to observe how the context was formed. The finds from the fill of the burial, both artefacts and ecofacts, should be measured in three dimension and documented in plan drawings and photos. A single plan of the bottom level with the skeleton is not sufficient. The position of the skeleton should be recorded according to principles of field anthropology, to ensure maximum interpretative possibilities and the reconstruction of the original appearance of the burial context (for principles of skeletal remains documentation see: Duday & Guillon 2006).

I am aware that in the present economic and social conditions the excavations are conducted mostly in connection to developments and investments. This results in excavations being conducted within very limited time frame and certain choices, when it comes to methodology, have to be made. However, the data that derived from the field, except being collected in the fast manner that ensures development, should be able to answer research questions. The possible solution, combining the time and money saving is the employment of digital methods, mostly using tools to create 3D site models. With introduction of programs using image-based modelling, that can be run on most higher-end computers and utilise photos from digital cameras, the affordable and efficient solution is available. The main thing to record, in the attempt to reconstruct the original burial context, is the position of finds and human remains in the grave in relation to each other. On a good quality, scaled 3D model measurements can be taken and details, that originally might have been missed during recording for documentation, observed. Studies on implementation of digital methods in mortuary archaeology should receive higher priority, since only the use of fast and accurate technology can prevent us from the loss of data.

3.3 Problems and further research

The thesis is in a large part based on archaeological theory. History proves that trends change, and what was thought to be ground-breaking soon appears ridiculous. The social model, based largely on Butler’s and Jenkins’s theories, as well as on the descriptions from written sources and rune stones is far from being universal. It shares, despite my attempts the same gender and social bias as the old models. The main difference can be in awareness that large groups of population might have lived according to different principles than accumulating social connections. One of the main concerns of further research should be an attempt to base the future models on more universal sources.

The further problem in the thesis is the lack of concern for the correlation of sex of individuals and different phenomena that can be related to ritual action. It was my conscious choice not to emphasise the binary sex model, as it might not be applicable to Old Norse societies. This is partially related to Judith Butler’s theoretical influence and my opinion that normative categories employed towards interpretation of the Viking Age need to be

reconstructed and partially the imperfection of the past sexing methods, in majority employed in description of the skeletal remains from Scanian sites. However, sexing of skeletons appears in the text, according to published data, but I used it to illustrate that both representatives of binary sex model received similar ritual treatment.

The lack of concern for artefacts, visible throughout the thesis, is the result of orientation towards tracing practice. Additionally, the time was a limiting factor and I would be unable to work with extensive categories of material and produce relevant observations to address my research question during the master thesis program. When the dating of an artefact is used, it follows the published information. Under ideal conditions re-examination of finds and dating would be highly desirable.

An important task that needs to be undertaken is to publish and digitalise the documentation from the past excavations conducted on South-western Scanian cemeteries. Access to data (I am very grateful for), although easily obtainable through the contact with the particular institutions, is still a limiting factor. This thesis would be impossible to write if it was based on published descriptions and drawings alone. The digitisation of data would allow implementation of analysis through the use of different GIS platforms, highlighting different spatial and landscape aspects of the sites. Many variables were not introduced, because conducting the analysis on non-digitised sites would take too much time, and the digitalisation was out of the question for the same reason. An example can be the position of the iron knives in burials. When described, items tend to be placed on the chest of the deceased, near his arm or near the pelvic region. This can be a coincidence reflecting the movement of the item during the flattening of the rib cage caused by the decomposition, or a trace of intentional action. Correlation with other variables could highlight if it is related, for example, to chronology or spatial division of the sites. Similar studies could be conducted on orientation and position of the corpse in the burial. The digitisation would allow correlating the graves with other features discovered at the cemeteries as well. It is possible that interesting structures, such as post-built houses found on Zealand (Ulriksen 2011) existed also on Scanian cemeteries.

The thesis provides a brief description of traces of ritualised practice and some comparative material. Interpretation is reached according to personhood and social relations model applied. I am, however, far from stating that this is the only proper understanding of the material. My goal was to provide new ways of looking at the burials, combining social theories, taphonomy and history. The work I have done is not about disapproving, but about providing alternatives for the well-established concepts about the Viking Age. Only through this kind of action we can break from stagnation and move towards new conclusions.

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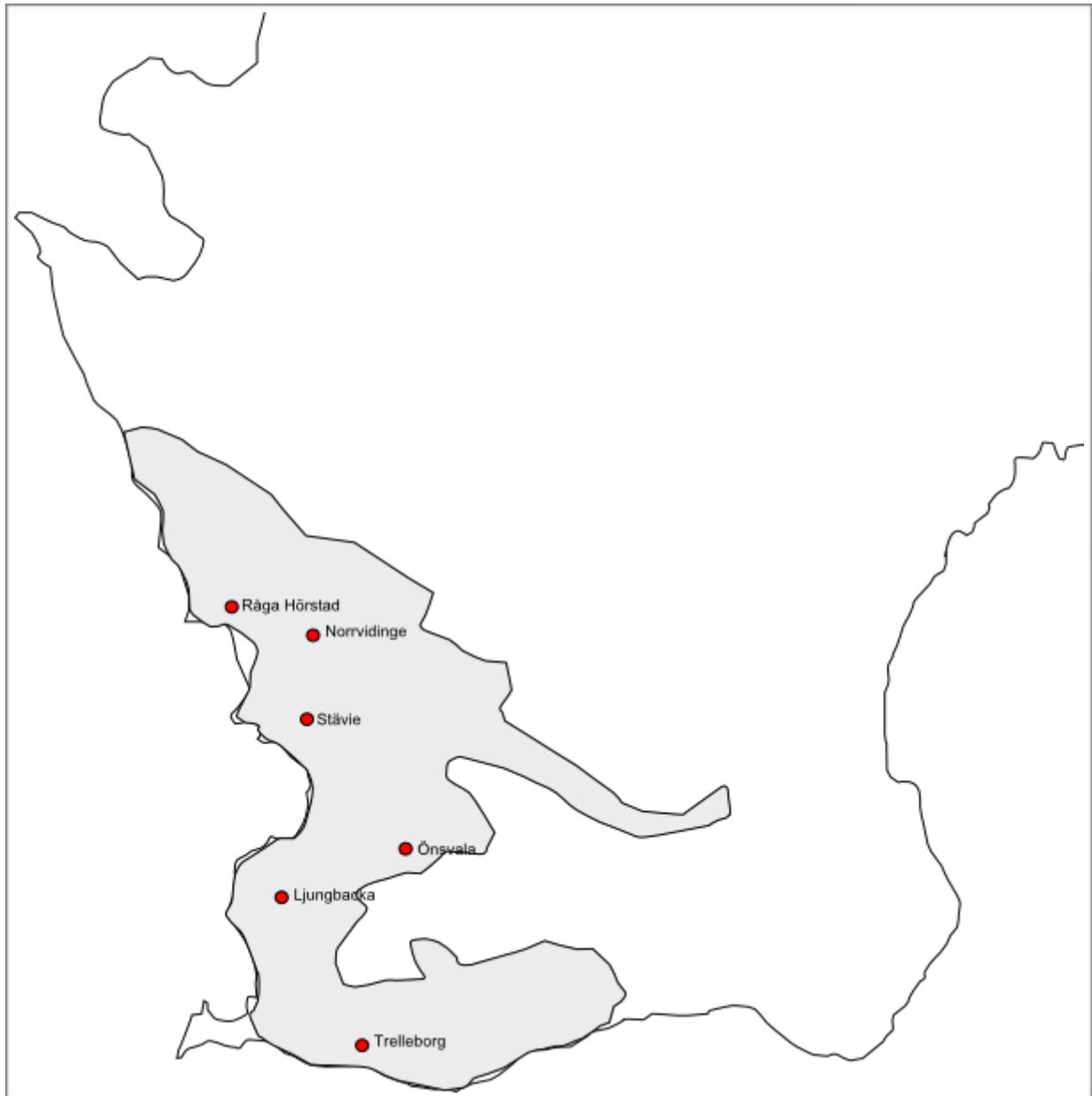


Fig. 1 Map of Scania with Sites marked. Light grey colour marks the extent of settlement during the Viking Age in South western part of Peninsula (from: Svanberg 2003b)

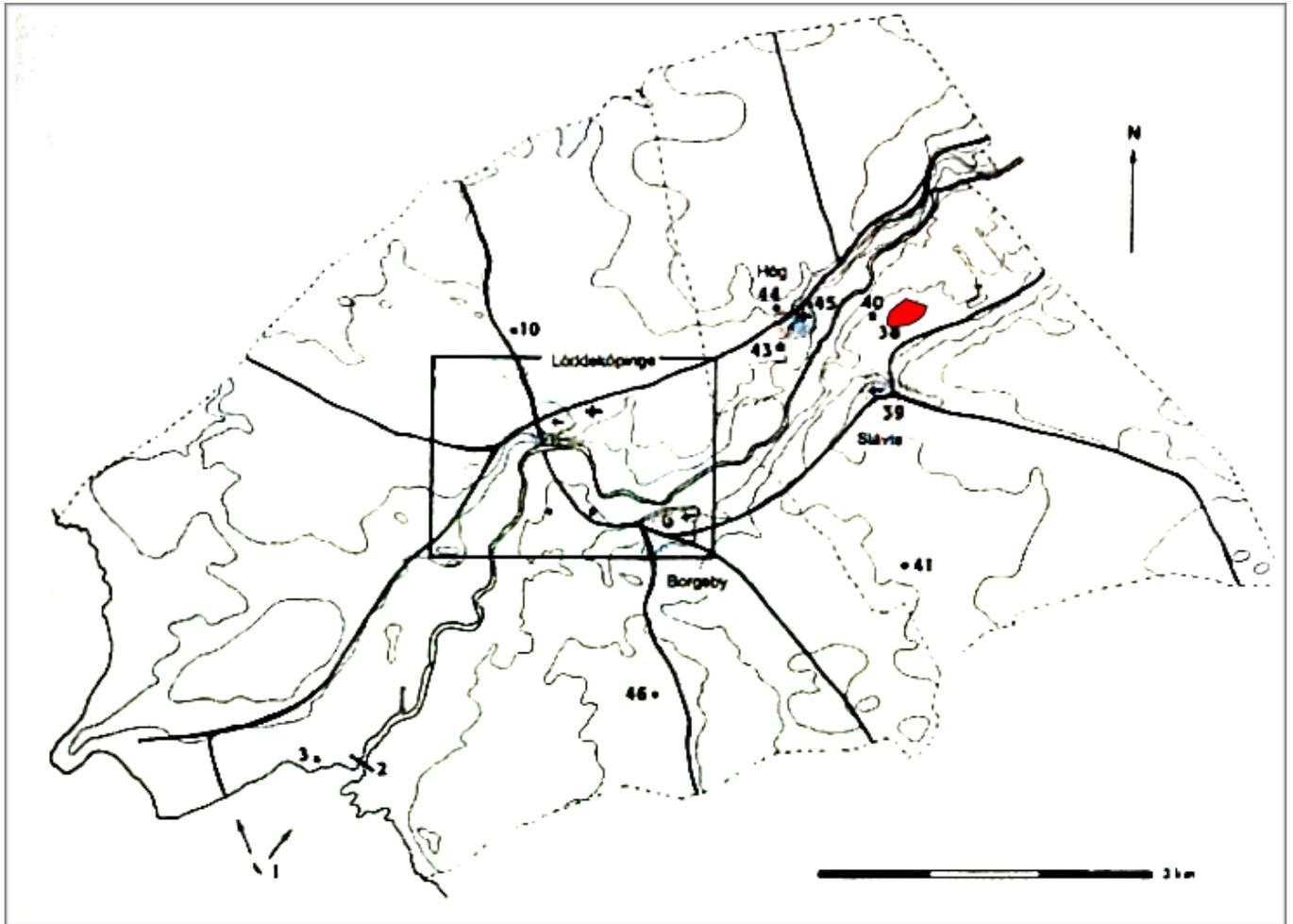


Fig. 2 The cemetery at Stävie (red polygon) in the settlement context of the area (from: Svanberg and Söderberg 2000).

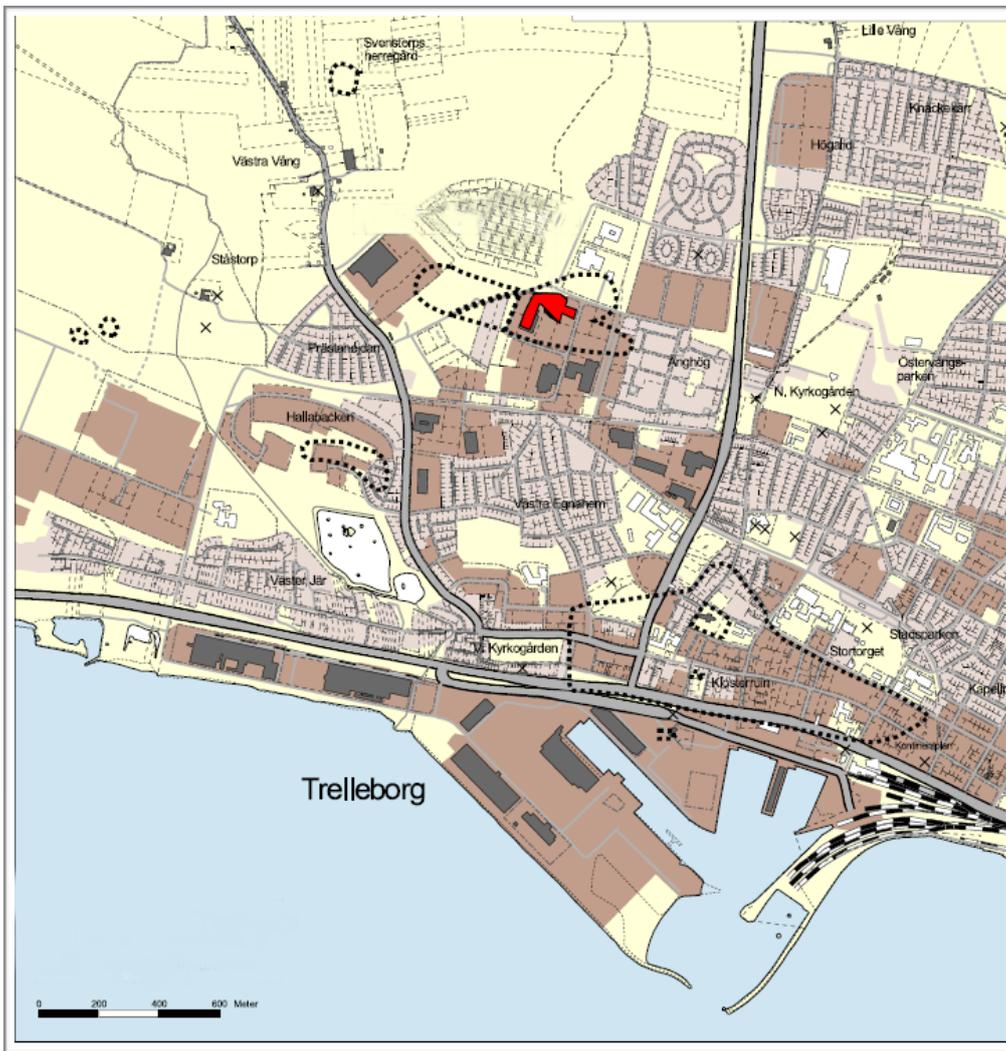


Fig. 3 The cemetery at Trelleborg (Red Polygon) in context of the area. The dashed line marks area of archaeological interest (From: Hellerström 2005)

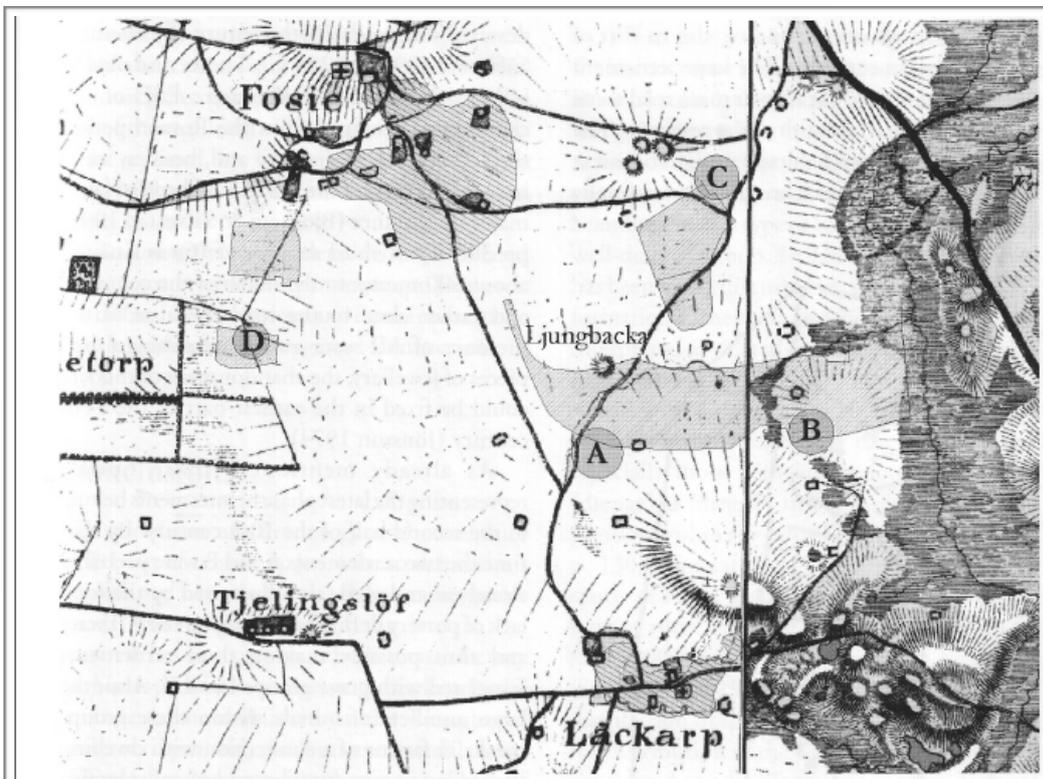


Fig. 4 The cemetery at Ljungbacka, with surrounding Viking Age settlements highlighted: A-C settlements at Fosie IV, D - settlement at Vårången (from: Samuelsson 2001)

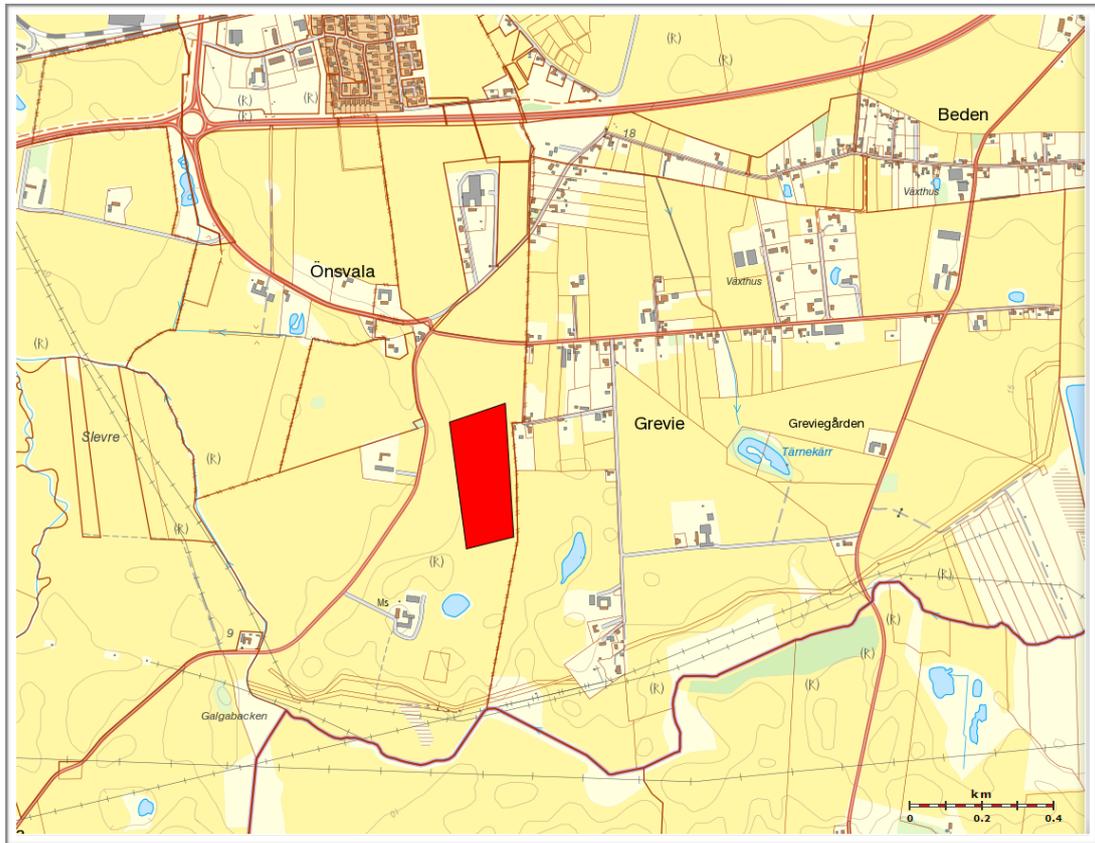


Fig. 5 The cemetery at Önsvala marked by red polygon.

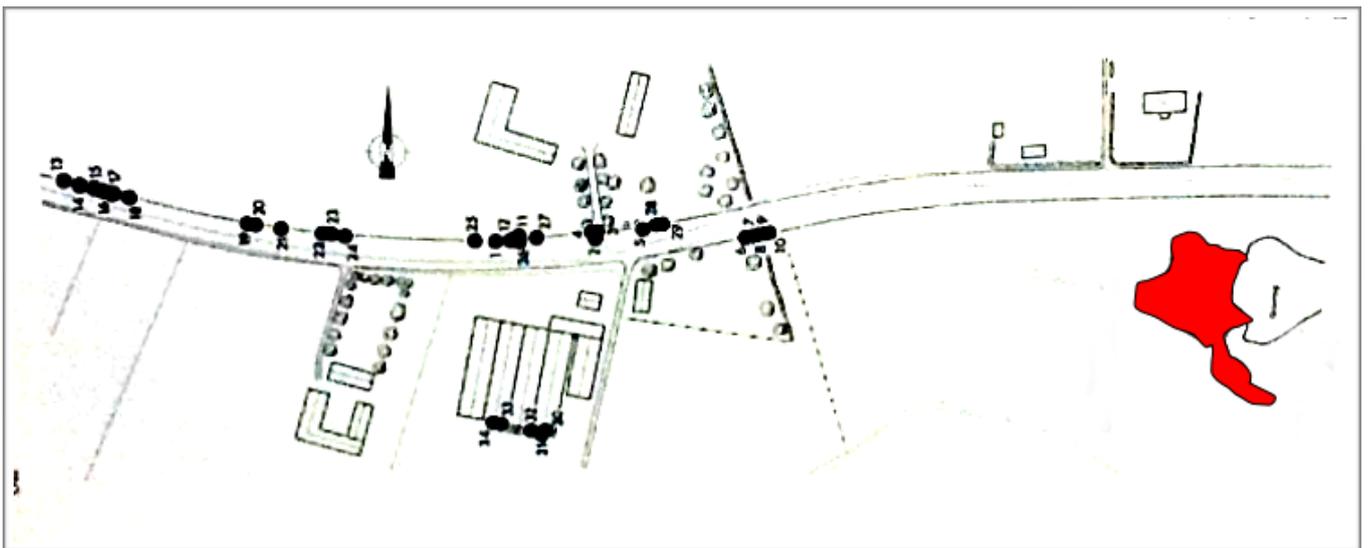


Fig. 6 The cemetery at Råga Hörstad (red polygon) in the context of nearby iron age settlement finds (black dots) (from: Strömberg 1968)

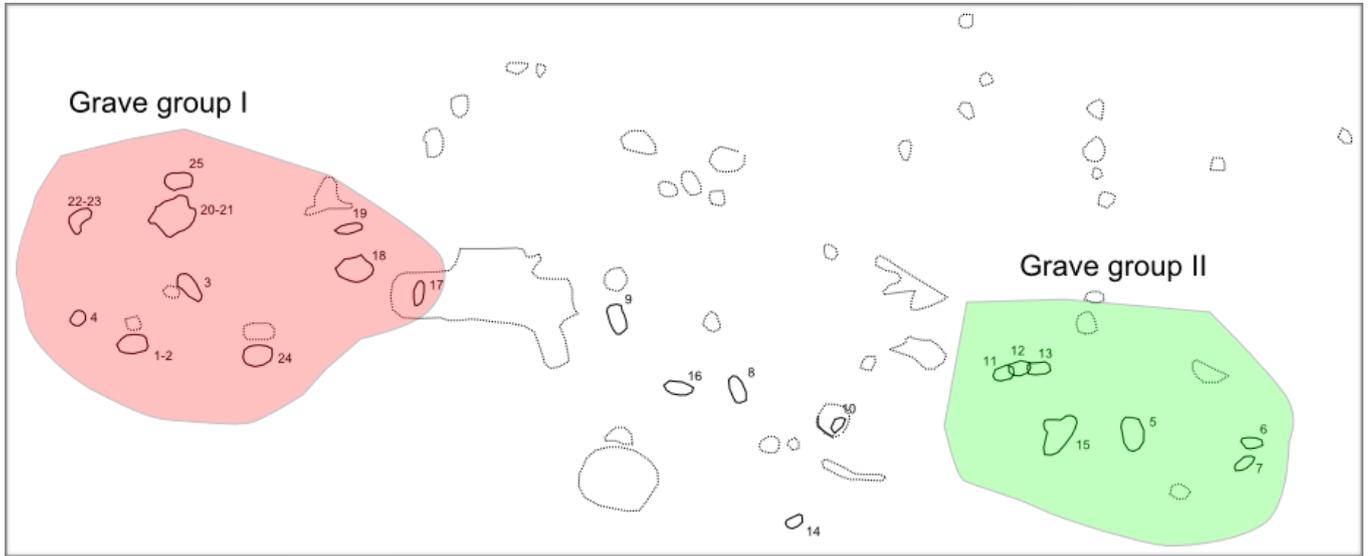


Fig. 7 Plan and possible division into grave groups from Önsvala. The features drawn in dashed lines represent non-grave features found in the area (redrawn from field documentation stored at LUHM).

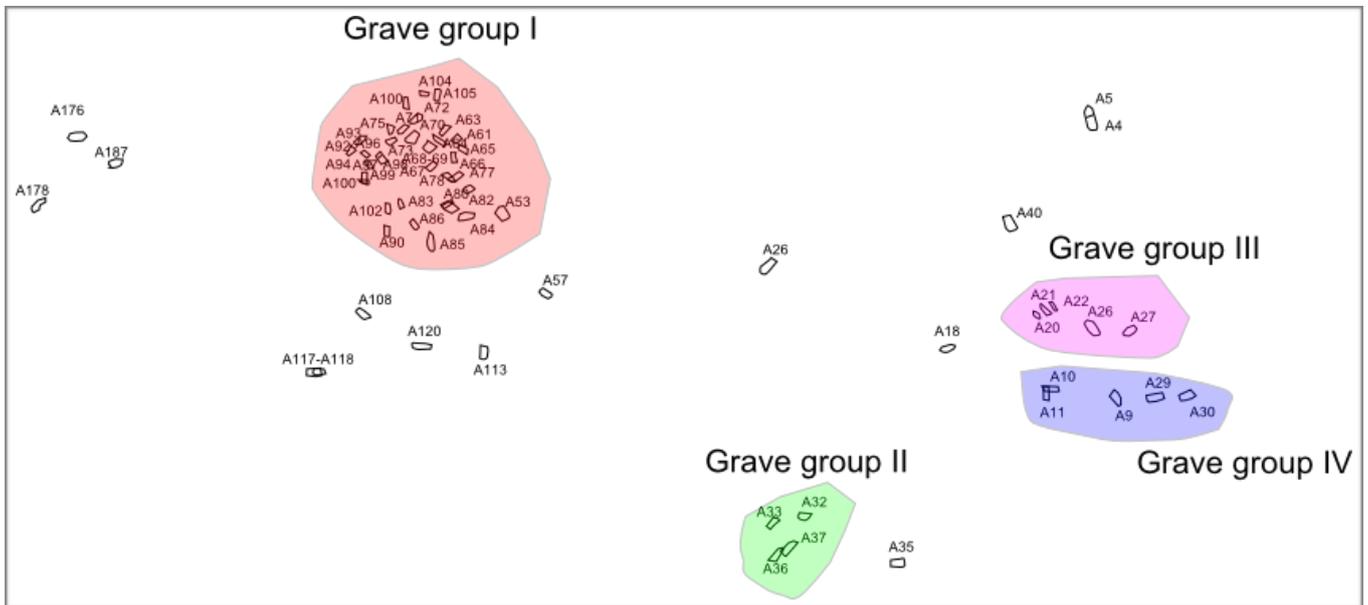


Fig. 8 Plan of cemetery at Stävie with possible division into burial clusters (plan after: Nagmér 1979)

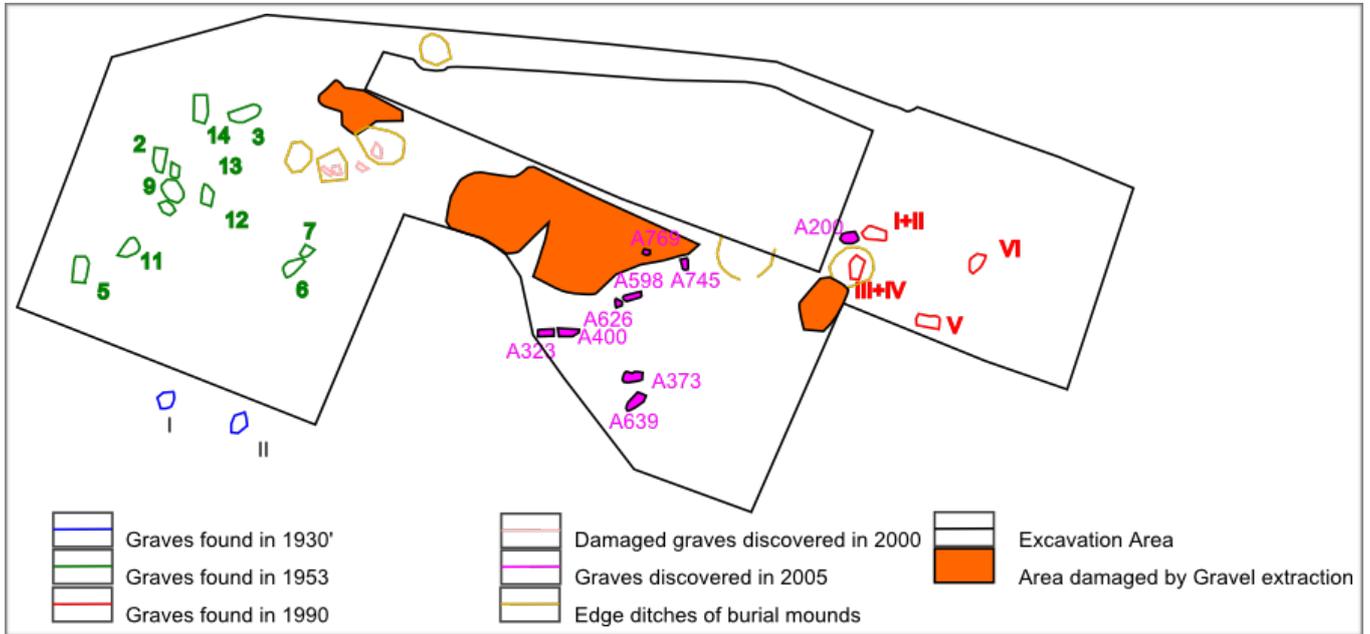


Fig. 9 Plan of cemetery at Trelleborg.

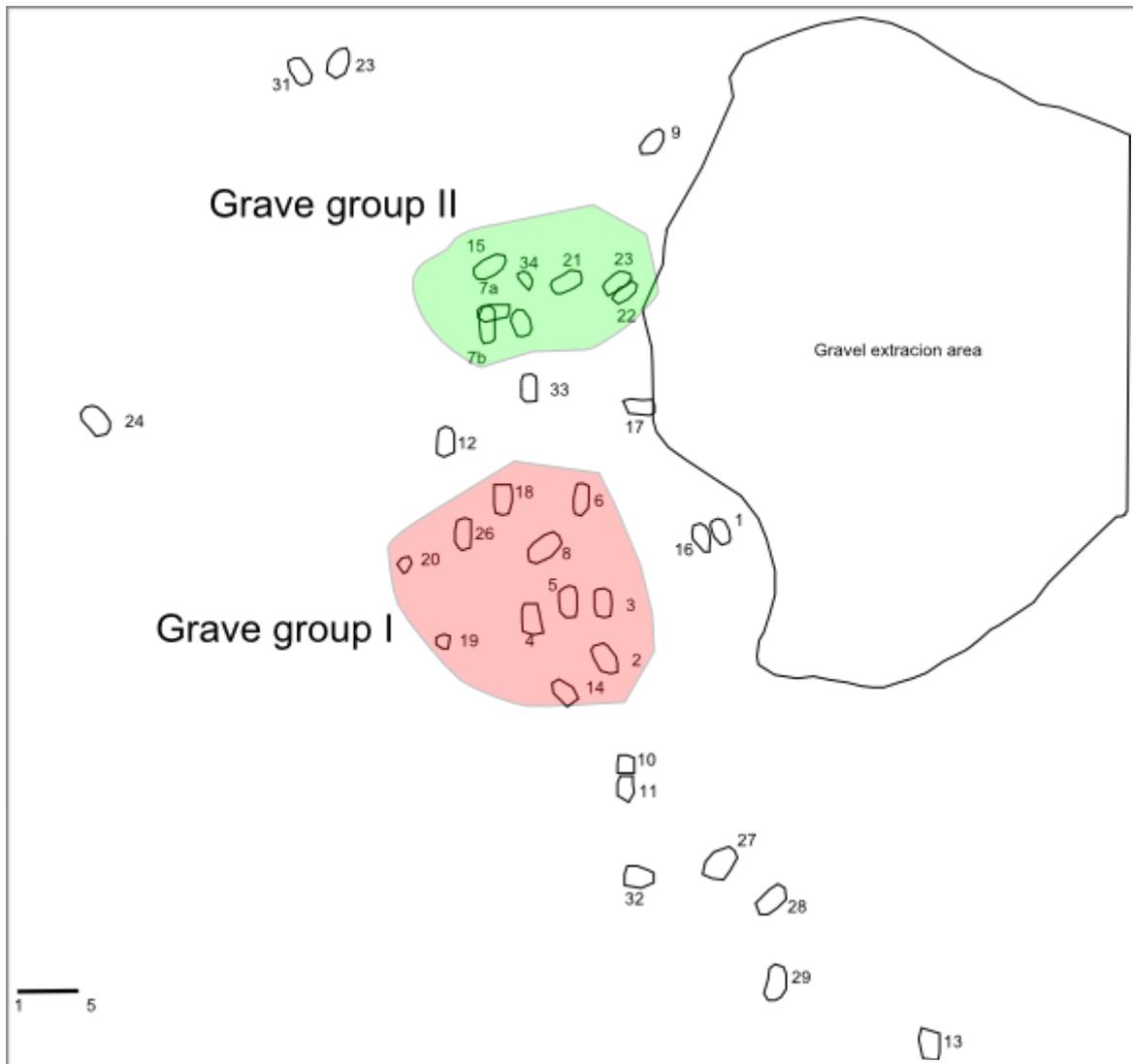


Fig. 10 Plan of cemetery at Råga Hörstad.

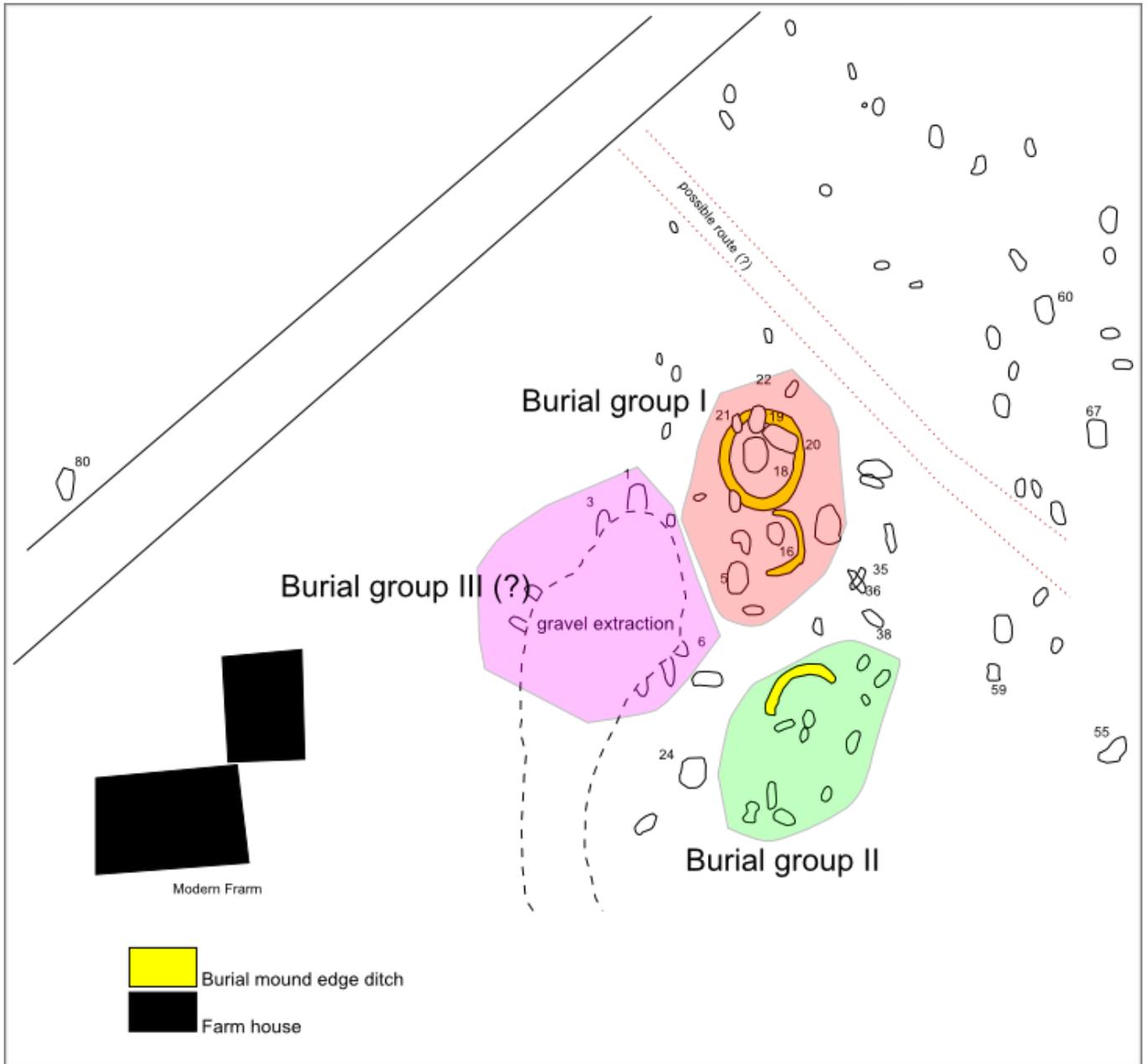


Fig. 11 Plan of cemetery at Norrvidinge with possible grave groups and route marked (plan from: Svanberg 2003b)

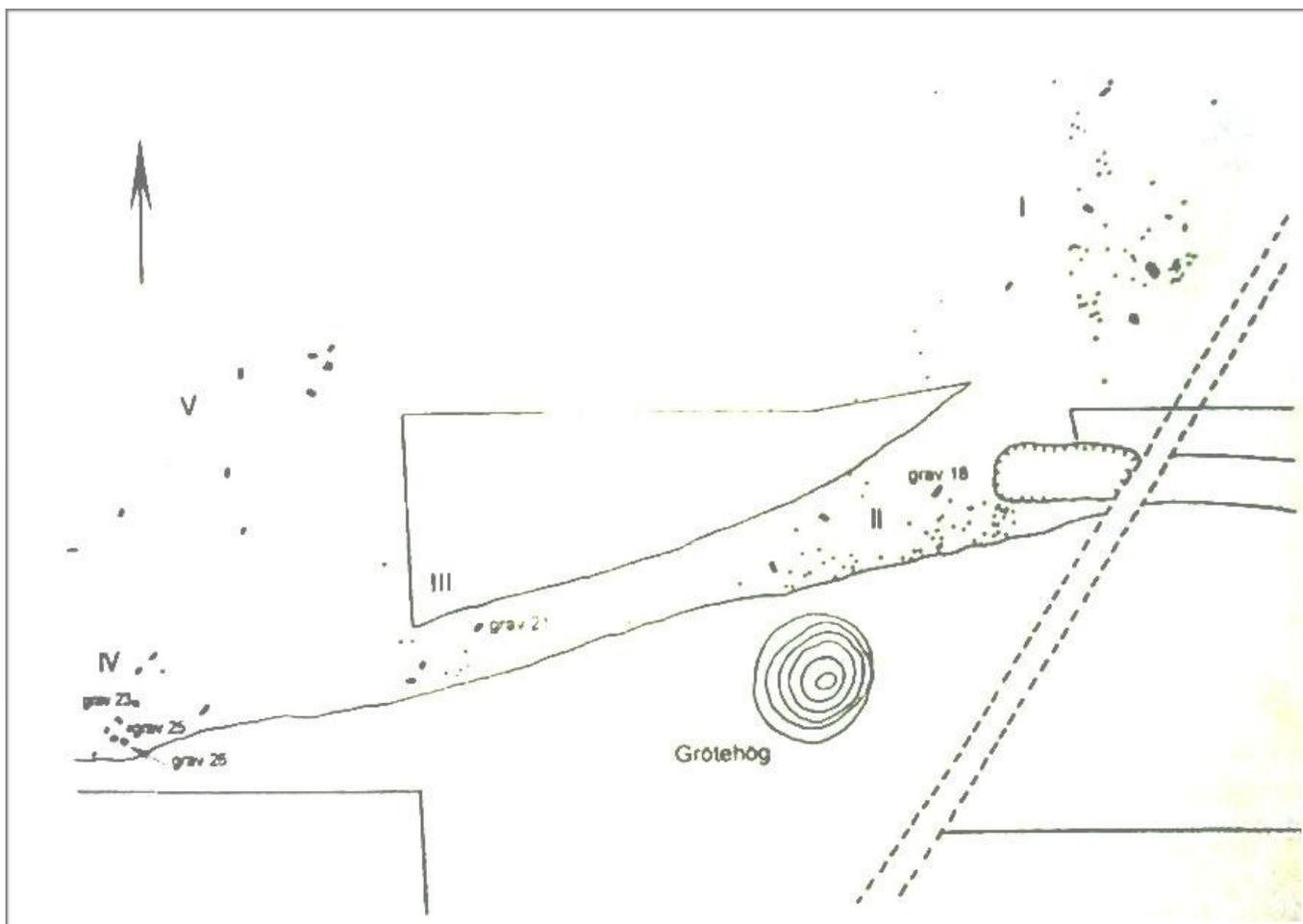


Fig. 12 Cemetery at Ljungbacka with division of graves into groups (from: Samuelsson 2001)

	Ljungbacka	Stävie	Önsvala	Råga Hörstad	Norrvidinge	Trelleborg
Roman Iron Age	0	1	5	0	0	0
Migration Period	0	4	2*	0	0	0
Vendel Period	1	0	5	2	0	2
Viking Age	8	11	7	2	5	4
General Late Iron Age dating	181	53	7	30	75	34 (?)

Tab. 1 The number of burials dateable to different periods of late Iron age discovered at the sites. (Data from Svanberg: 2003b and Hellerström 2005). Total number of discovered burials at Trelleborg is uncertain. * - Larsson dated some of the burials to migration period, in Svanberg's thesis they are not mentioned, here burials described as possible Vendel/ Roman Iron Age were included