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The Wealth from Crucible and Anvil

Multimetality, Spatiality and Socio-economy in Iron Age south-east Scandinavia

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The wealth from Crucible and Anvil – Multimetallicity, Spatiality and Socio-economy in Iron Age south-east Scandinavia

2. Metals, metallurgy and societies

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Abstract text

The project 'From the Crucible and at the Anvil' examines the socio-economic implications of metalworking in Iron Age Scandinavia, focused on the spatiality, economic remits and technological repertoires of metal use. The connection between economy and metal use is central to the project and thus economic theory and spatial statistics are paired with archaeological and archaeometallurgical analyses to interpret the role och metal use and metalworking within Iron Age society. The project advocates an inclusive perspective with regards to metal use – covering the utilization of both ferrous and non-ferrous metals and analysing the differing and similar aspects connecting and separating them, technically and conceptually.

Within one case-study, metalworking sites have been analysed from a macro-level landscape perspective covering the wider south-east Scandinavian region throughout the Scandinavian Iron Age (500BCE-1100CE). The aim has been to infer the socio-economic implications of metal use through the macro-spatiality of metalworking sites.

In this paper, results from the case-study are presented and evaluated. The macro-spatial patterns of metal craftsmanship are used to infer the role of metal use in the overarching economic climate of the Scandinavian Iron Age. Employing a large data-set from both contract archaeology and large-scale inventory projects in southern Sweden, quantitative approaches and formal spatial statistics have been both necessary and fruitful. Using a macro-level approach, the site-information analysed was reduced, with general spatial location, primary metal use and coarse chronology forming key attributes.

This method differs significantly from the more high-resolution and qualitative approaches normally favoured when countering questions concerning the societal implications of metal use. The benefits and limitations of macro-level landscape perspectives are thoroughly discussed in the paper and methods for how such methods can be fruitfully integrated in the economic analyses of the Scandinavian Iron Age are suggested.

A qualitative landscape analysis of a sub-region of the study area forms the basis of another case-study within the project. The focus in this regard has been to elucidate the spatiality of commodity-chains of metal use, and to contrast those patterns to the general Iron Age landscape. Comparing the two case studies provides the opportunity to gauge the use of both sets of approaches, highlighting their pros and cons. Arguments for utilizing an inclusive toolbox with regards to method and theory when interpreting the societal implications of metal use will in this way be advanced in the paper.

Keywords: Metal use, Landscape analysis, Multimetallicity, Socio-economy, Commodity-chains