

Building function, social space and the reconstruction of daily life: a South Scandinavian case study

Gebäudefunktion, Raum und die Rekonstruktion des Alltagslebens:
ein Südschandinavisches Beispiel

Fonction de la construction des bâtiments, milieu social et la reconstruction
de la vie quotidienne: un exemple de la Scandinavie du Sud

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The archaeological material (finds & features) excavated 1995 in Kyrkheddinge, Skåne (South Sweden), constitutes the basis of the present study. The periods 4 and 5, dating c. 1200-1475 AD, are here studied in order to answer questions concerning the structures of everyday life (here defined as repeated and routinized action within a limited space as reflected in the archaeological material). The organisation of space within the houses as well as on the courtyard was studied by use of find distribution maps. The dispersal maps proved useful for the reconstruction of everyday life on this specific farm, concerning both the actions themselves as well as the places where they were conducted. The maps provided important data for the reconstruction of the buildings as well as for the understanding of building techniques and thus help interpreting the features observed in the field. Waste deposition and activity patterns are being discussed in relation to the building structures.

Introduction

The present paper will discuss questions concerning everyday life on a medieval farmstead during the High and Late Middle Ages in southern Scandinavia, more precisely Scania, Sweden, based on the use of find distribution maps. The aim of the study is twofold. First, an attempt to trace the structures of everyday life (here defined as repeated and routinized action within a limited space as visible through the archaeological record) on a medieval farm, is being made. The second aim of the study is to discuss whether the combined study of building remains and find distribution maps can contribute to a more complete picture of the everyday life on a medieval farm than it would be possible if the building remains and the find material were studied separately. The study includes discussions on building construction, activity areas, waste deposit patterns and a possible presence of a division into public and private spheres. An attempt to compare the find material within the houses with the find material on the courtyard between the buildings is also being made. The material used in the study comes from the recently (1995) excavated site Kyrkheddinge, situated in southern Sweden; approximately 6 kilometers south-east of the town Lund, on the for the region so typical plain (Schmidt Sabo 1998; 2001; here fig. 1). The work was originally done as a masters degree at the University of Lund and is here presented in a shortened and slightly modified version (Bentz 1999).

A steadily growing amount of publications dealing with topics concerning the organisation of space and the perception of space in the Middle Ages show that there is a broad interest in interpreting and understanding past human thoughts and behaviour as

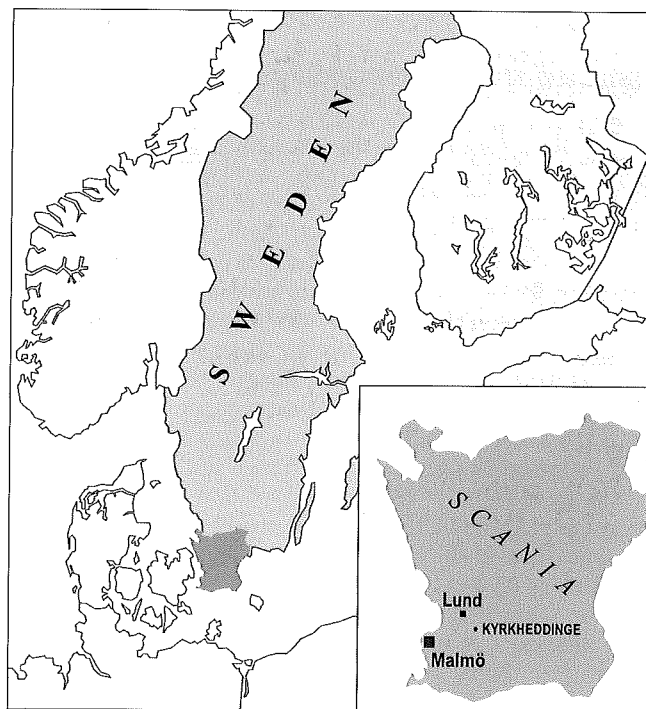


Fig. 1. Overview map showing the location of the site Kyrkheddinge, Sweden.

reflected through the space people lived in; the definition of space varying from context to context (see for example Austin - Thomas 1990). Within this broad research field there is room also for combined studies based on building remains and find distribution,

although combined studies of this kind tend to be rather uncommon for the medieval period. This is due to several reasons, some more obvious than others. First of all, many sites on the countryside simply lack surface structures well preserved enough to allow more detailed studies. Deep ploughing on land that has been cultivated over large time spans makes detailed studies complicated since the layers tend to be mixed and fragmentary. Sometimes the prerequisites are there, but due to time pressure and rough excavation methods the documentation available makes work with distribution maps impossible. At last, the discussion of post-medieval disturbance and other source critical aspects, make some archaeologists avoid using this method. There is, as a result of the above sketched situation, only a very limited number of publications presenting countryside sites where there have been attempts made to work with find distribution maps in the different medieval periods [see for example *Andersson - Svensson (eds.) 2002; Makepeace 2001; Schmidt Sabo 2001; Smetánka 1988; Westphalen 1999; Wrathmell 1989*]. It is however important that these small-scale and rather time consuming studies are being undertaken. When studying past households with an emphasis on the building remains you so to speak create and interpret the "stage" where the daily life was conducted, repeated and routinized. When the artefacts are studied separately or used only for dating you lack the contents, that could fill the space with additional meaning.

The case study Kyrkheddinge

The investigation of the site Kyrkheddinge was, as most excavations in Sweden, a rescue excavation, conducted by the National Board of Antiquities due to a road construction (*Schmidt Sabo 1998; 2001*). In total, a surface of 3200 m² was archaeologically investigated (*fig. 2*). On the oldest preserved map of the village of Kyrkheddinge from 1802-1804 it was clear that the new road would cut through at least one farmstead belonging to the medieval village. The finds from Kyrkheddinge start in the Neolithic period and end with the traces of a 17th-19th century farm structure. The remains of the medieval village and its structure, which is of interest for this paper, can be divided into seven periods¹. For this specific study the two medieval periods 4 and 5 were selected. They date between c. 1200-1475 AD. A rich and varied find material and similar L-shaped farm structures placed out on a clearly defined toft made the two phases suitable for the study (*fig. 2*). A second reason for choosing to work with the Kyrkheddinge site was the documentation method used during the excavations. The layers and constructions had been investigated in a stratigraphic, contextual way at the same time as the finds had been documented per square meter. A third reason for wor-

king with Kyrkheddinge was the relatively good state of preservation in comparison with other available sites in the region. In Kyrkheddinge several floor layers were present and also the area between the houses, i.e. the courtyard, was preserved and excavated.

The periods 4 and 5 included two main buildings each. One east-west oriented and one north-south oriented (*fig. 2*). A surface between the buildings containing cultural layers was limited by the buildings to the north and to the east in both periods, and interpreted as the courtyard. The similar lay-out of the buildings on the toft in both periods marks a continuity. The above mentioned similarities made it interesting to compare both periods. One question resulting from this situation is whether a similarity in the architectural structure also means there was a similar organisation of the space within the buildings? One last reason for studying period 4 and 5 together has to do with the building ÖK 113. This north-south oriented building from period 4 had, according to the excavation report, a possible existence into the following period 5, until c. 1350 (*Thomasson 1998*). It would therefore seem incomplete and inconsequent to study only one phase.

Period 4 consisted, as already mentioned, of two well defined buildings (*Thomasson 1998*). The east-west oriented house (ÖK 110) was situated on the northern limit of the excavation area and its northern long side was therefore partly incomplete. The house was one-aisled with roof-supporting, earth-dug posts, approximately 26 meters long and 5 meters broad. Fragments of clay made a construction in wattle-and-daub likely. A partition into three rooms was visible. The building structure itself was rather well-preserved but the cultural layers were partly destroyed as a result of younger activities on the site. The second building in period 4 is the ÖK 113; a two-aisled house constructed with earth-dug posts. The house measured 21,5 x 4,5 meters. The northern half of the building was rather fragmentary and allowed no conclusions concerning a possible internal division. In the southern part, on the other hand, at least one room could be identified. This southernmost chamber measured 3,5 x 4,5 meter and showed remains of several cultural layers and a hearth. Also belonging to period 4 are three ditches, interpreted as toft boundaries. A larger activity area between the buildings has already been mentioned.

The younger period 5, dating 1250-1475 AD, showed the highest amount of well-preserved layers and structures. As in period 4, two buildings could be identified. The east-west oriented house ÖK 108 measured 16 x 5 meters and has been interpreted as a one-aisled construction resting upon sill stones. The sill stones were sometimes simply resting on the ground or, more common, placed into shallow ditches. Several sill stones were only visible as negative imprints in the ground. The main part of the building consisted out of walls in half-timbering where the

¹ In the most recent publication on the site a slightly altered division into periods has been made. I will consequently use the terminology from this younger publication. That means that the phases VII and VIII from the older publication will be named period 4 and 5 (*Schmidt Sabo 1998; 2001*).

² The description of the archaeologically identified buildings and other constructions from period 4 and 5 is a summary of the interpretations made in the excavation report from 1998 (*Thomasson 1998*).

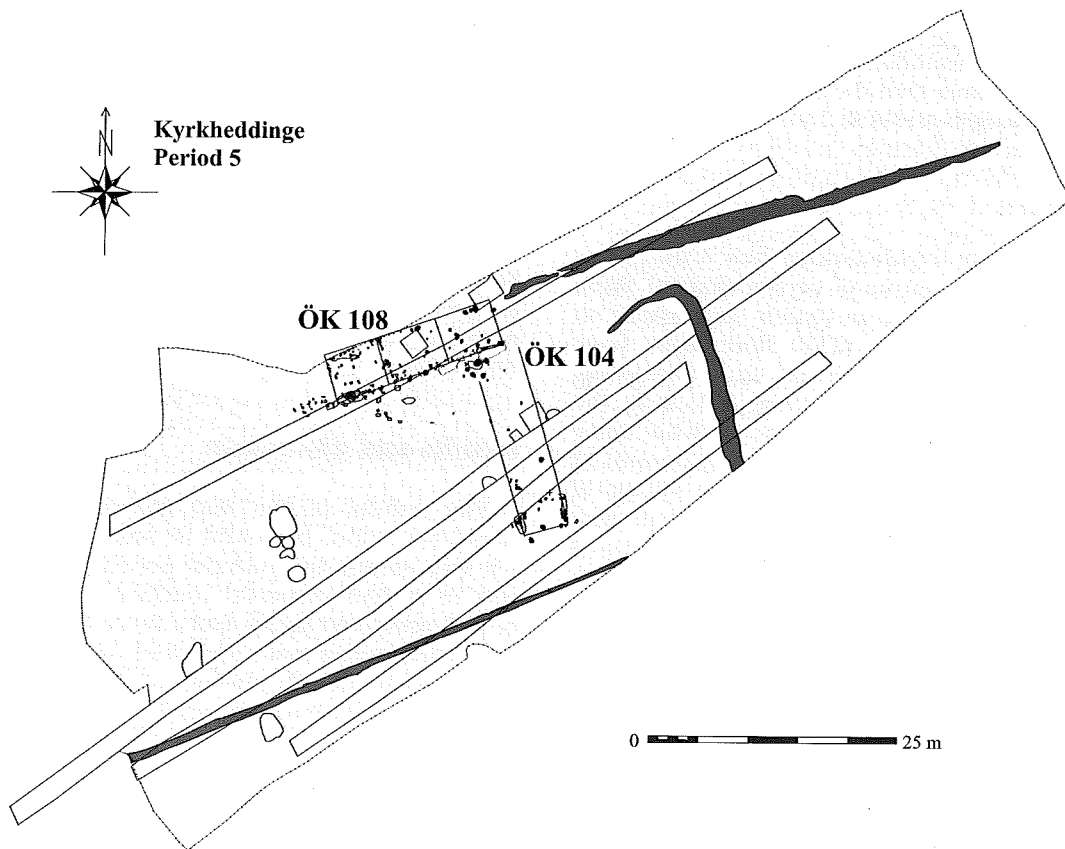
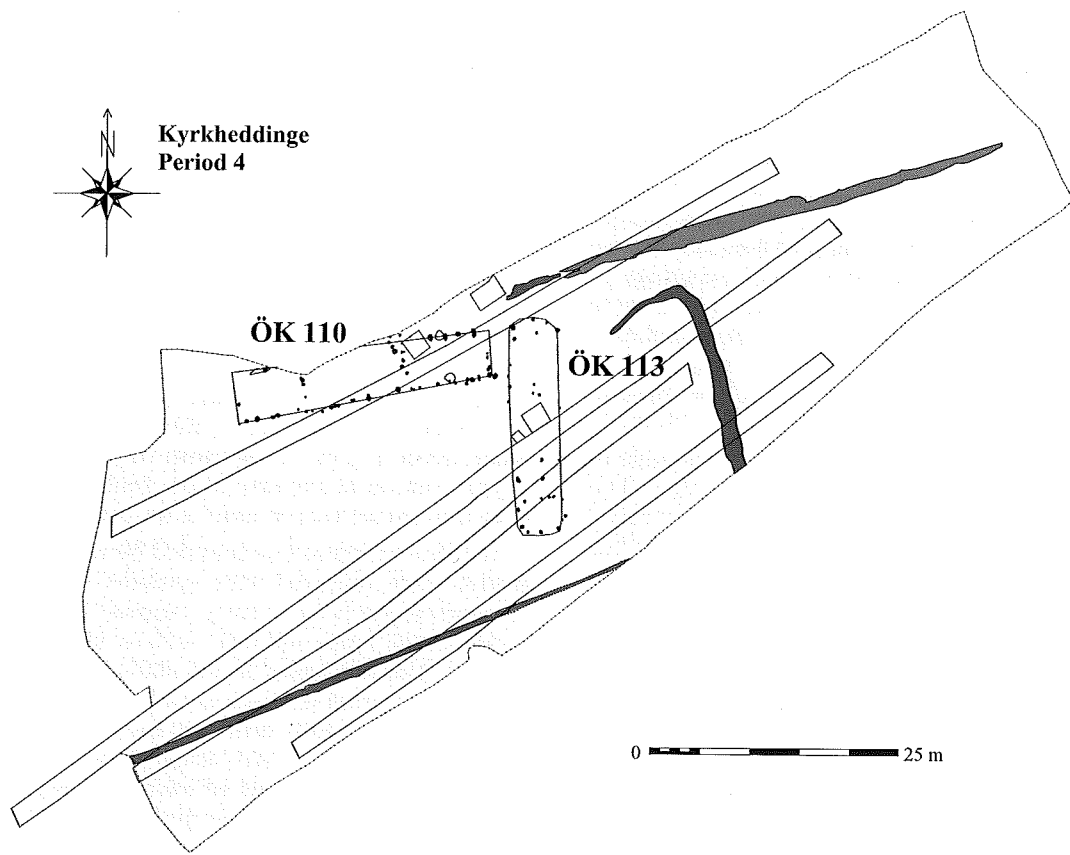


Fig. 2. Excavation plans showing features of period 4 (top) and 5 (below) in Kyrkheddinge (after Schmidt Sabo 1998 with modifications).

different panels were filled with either bricks or wattle-and-daub. Three rooms were visible. The middle room was equipped with an oven and was therefore interpreted as living room and kitchen. The rooms east and west of the middle room showed no visible structures that could help identifying the function of the rooms, the eastern room being rather fragmentary. The limits of building ÖK 108 towards the west are partly unclear. The building was the best preserved house from the period, also in comparison with the older buildings in period 4. Several floor layers and activity layers were preserved and investigated. Due to its long existence, changes in construction took place over time and in the documentation this is visible through a division into sub-phases.

The north-south oriented building ÖK 104 was in comparison with ÖK 108 rather incomplete. The building measured 18 x 5 meters. More coherent structures were present only in the southern part. In this part of the building a hearth could be identified together with different activity layers. It has been assumed that this part also had domestic functions, all-year round or just temporary during some months of the year (*Schmidt Sabo 2001, 72*). Sill stones and negative imprints of sill stones were present in this part of the building. The lack of cultural layers in the other parts of ÖK 104 has been seen as an indication for the assumption that this part of the building was primarily used as a barn. As in period 4, a courtyard between the houses could be identified and investigated. The boundary ditches that were visible in period 4 were also in use during this younger period.

From the above summarizing description of the periods it becomes clear that the analysis had to focus mainly on the younger period 5.

Method

The excavation in Kyrkheddinge has - this far - yielded the highest amount of archaeological finds coming from a medieval countryside settlement in southern Sweden. Close to 6000 find posts have been registered and 131 different find categories have been listed (*Schmidt Sabo 1998, 97*). Still, the material only represent a small part of what once was present on the farm. Concerning the amount of finds, parallels can be drawn only to the village of Önnerup, situated close to Lund, on the plains west of the town. Here, 4500 find posts were registered during the excavations 1983-84 (*Stenholm 1986; Pettersson 1996, 43*). An important difference between Önnerup and Kyrkheddinge is that while in Kyrkheddinge the finds were collected from one farm unit, the finds from Önnerup come from several different parts of the medieval village.

With a few exceptions the complete find material from the excavation in Kyrkheddinge was mapped. Basically, three different maps were used to illustrate the distribution of different groups of artefacts on the site. One map covers the central part of the excavation area in period 4, and the remaining two show the features of period 5. While period 4 covers a rather short

time-span, at the most 50 years, the remains from period 5 cover up to 225 years. This, of course, gives a different picture concerning layers and structures. During the excavation the east-west oriented building ÖK 108 in period 5 was divided into five sub-phases (*Thomasson 1998*). These sub-phases correspond to different changes in the history of the building, such as "new floor layer in the western room", "rebuilding" and "destruction" (*Thomasson 1998, 73-80*). It was, however, only in the western room that all the five sub-phases were represented. This fact, together with the short duration of each sub-phase, made it possible to combine them into just one map, the exception being sub-phase 5. This sub-phase constitutes the destruction of the building, visible through different kinds of destruction layers, some with traces of fire. These layers relating to the end of the building ÖK 108 have been illustrated with a map of its own.

The find material was mapped by hand. Smaller find groups were mapped with symbols while larger find categories, such as pottery, animal bones and brick (-fragments), were mapped with a statistical method (*Cziesla 1990*). Circles in six different sizes illustrate the find dispersal through equidistant intervals. Thus, the circles represent different intervals based on the number of finds, weight, fragments and so on. The highest and lowest value of each category is excluded and the second highest number is divided by six in order to create the equidistant intervals (*Cziesla 1990, 8-42*).

A cross-matching of the pot sherds was not undertaken. This means, to a certain extent, some additional insecurities concerning interpretations that have been made. It is likely, without having the results from a cross fitting, that the ceramic as well as other finds to a certain extent have "wandered" through the thin layers. This does however, not necessarily have to be a problem, since the sub-phases of period 5 (more precisely: building ÖK 108) represent only a very limited time-span. There are also very few post-medieval artefacts in period 4 and 5 and this can be seen as a sign for the relative absence of vertical movement and intermixing.

Results and discussion

The results of the find plotting should now be presented. First, it should be said that - as expected - it was mainly the younger period 5 that could be of use in a find dispersal analysis. A higher amount of well preserved layers and a more coherent structure made this period more representative. It was, however, necessary to include also period 4 in the analysis. The reasons for this have already been mentioned.

Period 4

From period 4 just one example will be discussed. Since the cultural layers were less extensive in this period conclusions mainly concerning the buildings themselves could be made. Burnt clay was mapped

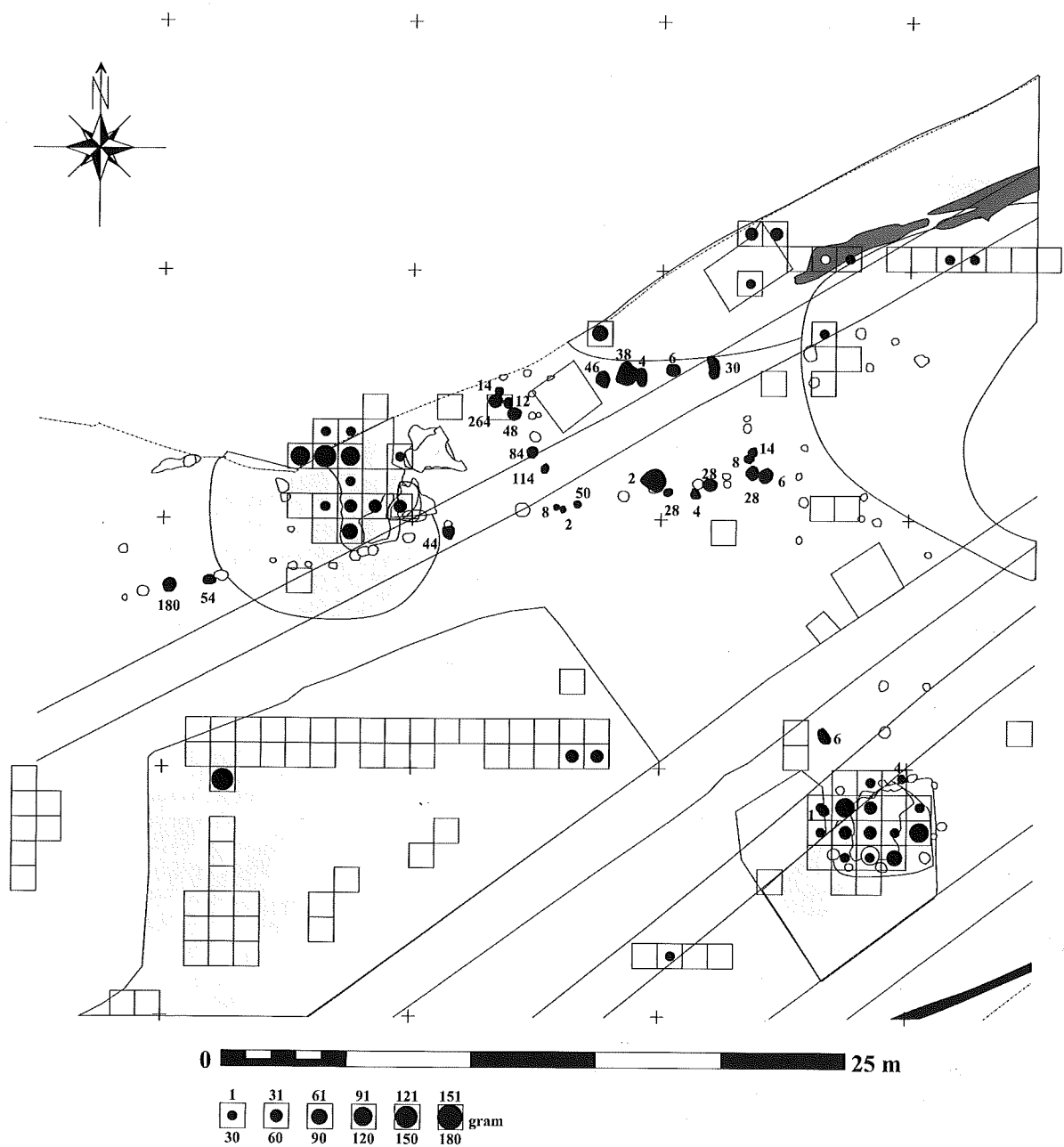


Fig. 3. Distribution of burnt clay in period 4.

and, as visible in *fig. 3*, there is a clear concentration to the post-holes belonging to the eastern room in the east-west oriented building ÖK 110. This pattern is also maintained when looking at other categories of finds, for example nails and pottery sherds. It is therefore highly plausible that this eastern room has had two phases. This interpretation is also confirmed in the younger publication on Kyrkheddinge where it is stated that, due to a fire, this part of ÖK 110 was rebuilt at some occasion (*Schmidt Sabo 2001*, 40). The finds from the post holes is then a result of maintenance work and/or a complete rebuilding.

Period 5

Distribution maps showing different categories of construction material proved to be useful in a discussion on building techniques and house limitations. Bricks and fragments of bricks constituted one of the larger find groups in period 5. Through the dispersion of this material it was possible to discuss house boundaries that had been partly unclear before (*fig. 4*). The western part of the building ÖK 108 in period 5 can serve as an illustration. The layer L6, situated immediately west of the building, was discussed in the



Fig. 4. Distribution of bricks and fragments of bricks in period 5, sub-phase 1-4.

excavation report (Thomasson 1998, 79). The question was whether the layer belonged to the building or not. The dispersal of brick fragments indicates that it is possible that the layer forms a part of the building complex. The distribution of nails also indicates a western limit of L6. On the other hand, the amounts of nails and brick fragments are rather low in this area and to a certain extent the insecurity remains. A plausible interpretation could therefore be that there has been some kind of construction, perhaps a roofed porch, belonging to ÖK 108 (compare Thomasson 1998, 79). With the help of dispersal maps it is also possible

to think about different interpretations to the destruction mode of building ÖK 108. Several layers in the sub-phase 5 show traces of fire and it can not be excluded that the walls, due to a fire, collapsed and fell apart, to the outside. This hypothesis is mainly founded on the fact that only very few brick fragments were found inside the building itself.

The nails constitute another important find category in a discussion concerning the buildings themselves (fig. 5). In period 5 the majority of the nails are laying outside the main building ÖK 108. The westernmost room in the same building makes an exception to this

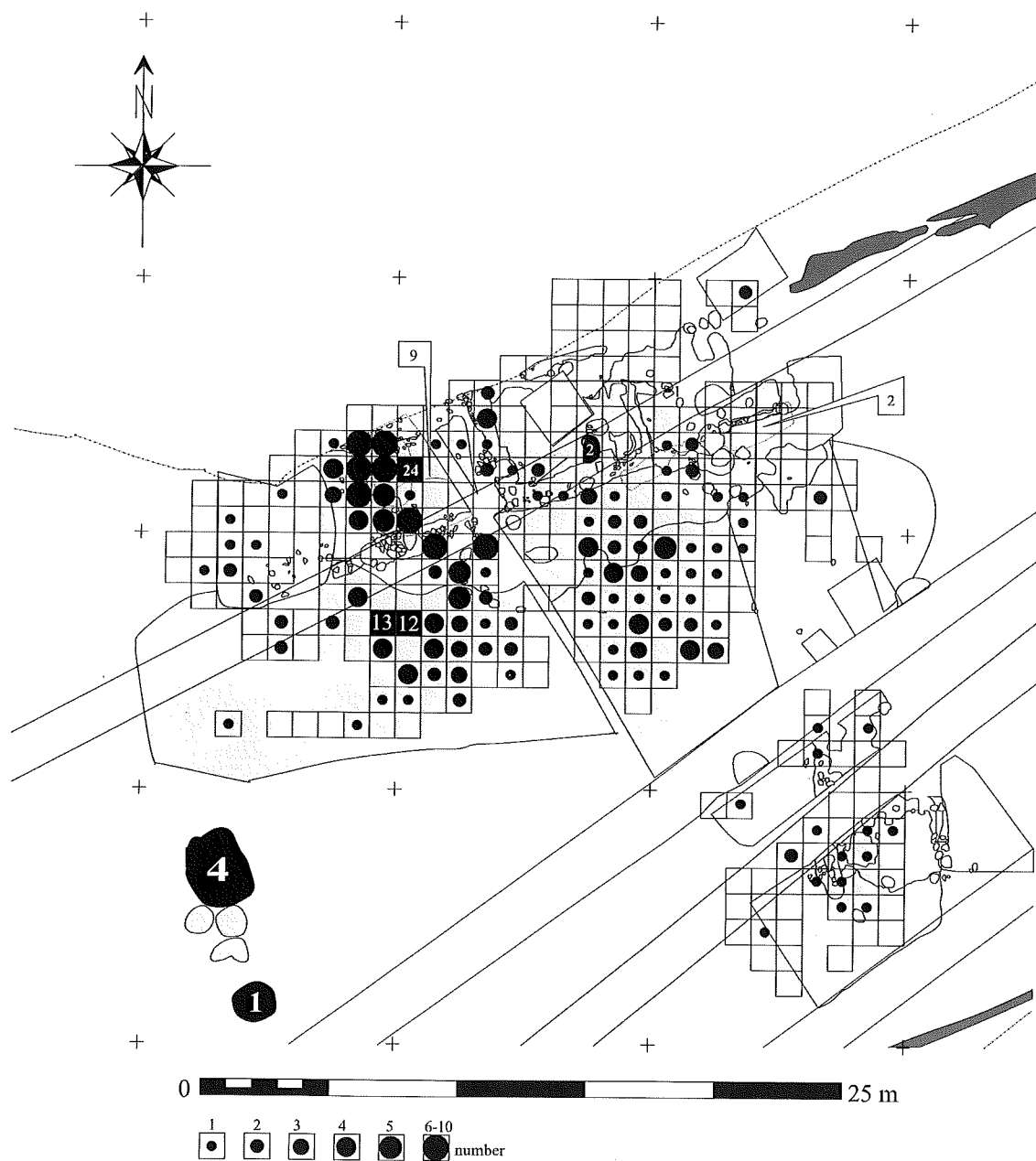


Fig. 5. Distribution of iron nails in period 5, sub-phase 5.

picture. The most logical explanation to this pattern is the higher amount of well preserved floor layers in this room. Also when mapping other find categories this room shows a higher concentration of finds than the other two. The find spectrum is also broader in this western room. Even if the situation easily can be explained with reference to the higher amount of well preserved layers the situation that there are more layers is interesting. It is in any case a sign of a more intense use of this area (cf. Schmidt Sabo 2001, 68). As follows from the above sketched situation this map can be seen as an example of the difficulties

and possibilities of working with find distribution maps.

In all, 15 coins were found in period 5 (Schmidt Sabo 2001, 70). 12 of these were found inside building ÖK 108. The majority of the coins were collected from the layers in the western room. The fact that most of the coins were collected inside the house make it possible that some finds (or find groups) make up in situ finds. The coins inside the building were collected from different floor layers and this indicates an unintentional loss during the time of occupation. The fact that most coins were collected from inside the

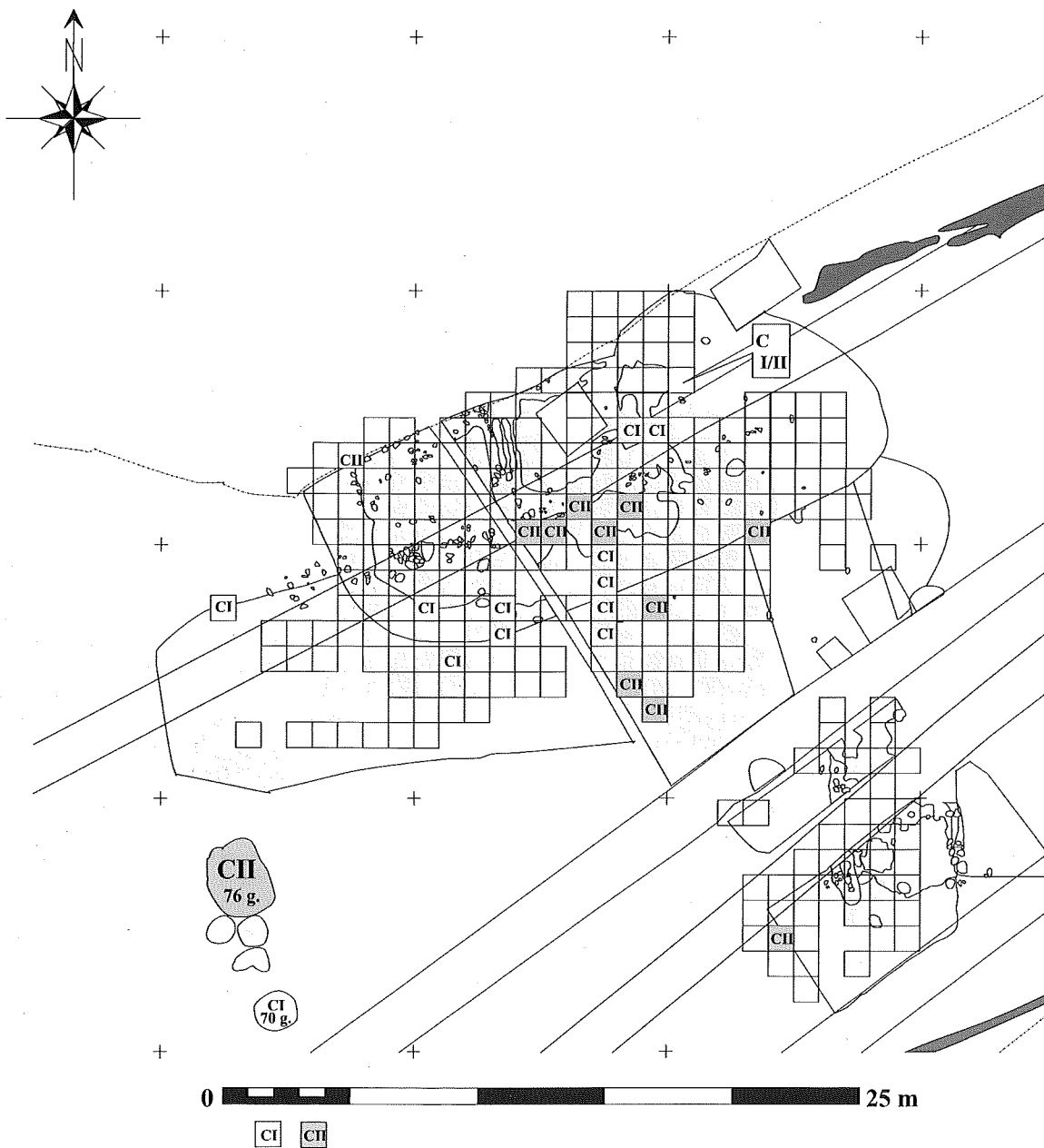


Fig. 6. Distribution of German stoneware in period 5, sub-phase 5. CI=German near stoneware, CII=German stoneware. Weight 1-14 gram if not shown otherwise.

house might indicate ideas about private and public. The coins would then represent a group of finds that was mainly handled indoors. A parallel to this situation, from a different context, can be seen in M. Roslund's work on the early medieval town Sigtuna in middle Sweden, where there is a concentration of coin finds to the inner parts of a toft. Money transactions are therefore interpreted as having taken place mainly in the more private sphere of a toft (Roslund 1995). The relatively high amount of coins in comparison with other excavated countryside settlements in the region has led to a discussion where it is being proposed that

the coins in Kyrkheddinge come from trade with textiles and cloth. As an argument for this interpretation, Katalin Schmidt Sabo mentions the increasing amount of sheep on the farm during period 5 and the high amount of finds relating to textile handicraft (Schmidt Sabo 1998, 102).

Another field where the find dispersal maps have proved useful is in a discussion on waste deposit patterns. During the excavation, pits filled with larger skeletal remains coming from slaughtered animals, were uncovered in the southwest corner of the farm complex (Thomasson 1998, 81; Johansson 1998, 130). It seems

that animal bones coming from meals eaten inside the house ÖK 108 simply were thrown on the floor or just outside the house, on the courtyard. The degree of fragmentation is a result of human and animal activity inside and outside the building (Johansson 1998, 130-132). The inhabitants have only partly avoided leaving waste simply on the floor, inside the house. The pottery sherds are for example, not exclusively but mainly, to be found on the courtyard, together with finds of different character that probably have been lost and/or dropped unintentionally, or swept out while the house was being cleaned (fig. 6). From the above sketched situation it is clear that traces of food remains were everywhere to be found while the pottery show a tendency towards having been deposited outside the building. In larger amounts, the discarded pottery might serve as drainage and thus help consolidate the courtyard. It is also likely that waste coming from the households and the economy buildings had a last function as manure on the cultivated fields belonging to the village.

From the result of mapping find categories connected with different kinds of handicraft as spinning, weaving and sewing, it is clear that no patterns in the dispersion of the finds exist! At first this notion might be surprising, but then a very simple explanation seems likely: the textile manufacturing and maintenance at different stages and other productive activities were conducted where it was most convenient at the moment. In summer probably outdoors, on the courtyard in front of the main building, and in winter in the kitchen/living room, where the fireplace brought light and heat. This conclusion is of course only valid for those handicrafts that require no fixed installations as for example the blacksmiths work does. The dispersion of whetstones, which probably belonged to the personal equipment of each person living on the farm, show a similar scattered distribution on the whole site, perhaps with a slight concentration to the areas just outside the main buildings. This could also reflect the flexibility in the activities conducted on the farmstead. When summarizing what has been mentioned above, one conclusion could be that the archaeologists should not expect to find fixed and well-defined areas for each activity on the farm when trying to find out a buildings function more in detail. It seems instead that activities that took place on a farm, taking portable tools in consideration, were flexible and not static, that they were conducted where it was most suitable for the moment. This is seen in the relation between tools and for example small finds in bronze and coins – find groups that are almost exclusively concentrated to the rooms inside building ÖK 108. It would be interesting for further work to investigate the validity of this hypothesis - is the production of certain objects on the farm flexible and unspecified or is it just a result of events during and after the existence of the farm?

Conclusions

From the above mentioned examples it is, according to my opinion, clear that the use of dispersal maps can

contribute to a discussion concerning building function, social space and the reconstruction of daily life. There are, however, still a number of difficulties connected with the use of this method. The state of preservation of the medieval remains and the excavation methods used in the field can be problematic with detailed studies like the one presented in this article. They together decide how much information it is possible to gain from the excavated material. In the continuation, this situation addresses an important problem of a more theoretical kind: namely the relation between the excavation methods used in the field and the questions the archaeologists wish to answer, and in the end, will be able to answer (cf. Larsson 2000). The case study in this text, Kyrkheddinge, is in this context a rather unique example, with both quite favourable preservation conditions and a documentation detailed enough to allow the studies presented here.

The combined study of artefacts and building remains allowed statements concerning building construction and the organisation of daily life on the farmstead of Kyrkheddinge. What is there then to gain from such a study? Simply put, working with a method combining the plotting of artefacts with the study of building structures, makes it possible to fill the space with contents. However, this does not mean that one should read and understand the maps as uncomplicated and absolute truths. It is more suitable to look upon these maps as basic work and as discussion material for further studies, as for example: how the spatial structure influence and determine human (inter)action and the other way around. It can be said that the form and shape of a farm complex also reflect the daily life on this specific farm. The farmstead with its buildings and spaces between the buildings constitute the "stage" where the daily life is repeated and reproduced. The farmstead as a whole represents and reflects the thoughts and ideas that the people that inhabited the farm had. Due to this dualistic relation the farmstead both forms the frames as well as the prerequisites for the daily life on the farm, with its constantly repeated and reproduced actions (cf. Gregory - Urry (eds.) 1985, 3).

Zusammenfassung

Ausgangspunkt dieser Studie ist das archäologische Material (Funde und Befunde) des 1995 gegrabenen Fundplatzes Kyrkheddinge, Skåne (Südschweden). Um Fragen der räumlichen Organisation des Alltags (hier verstanden als *archäologischer Niederschlag wiederholter bzw. routinierter Handlungen innerhalb eines begrenzten Areals*) zu beantworten, wurden im Rahmen einer Magisterarbeit die Phasen VII und VIII (ca. AD 1200-1475) des mehrphasigen Platzes bearbeitet. Die räumliche Organisation innerhalb der Häuser sowie des umschlossenen Hofgrundes, wie auch die Verteilung der Artefakte selbst, wurden mittels Verbreitungskarten rekonstruiert. Abseits aller quellen- und methodenkritischer Aspekte der Auswertung von Verteilungskarten erwies sich das Kartieren für einige Fundgruppen als besonders geeignet, der oben gestellten Frage nach der räumlichen Organisation des Alltags sowohl hinsichtlich der Handlungen selbst als auch bezüglich der Lokalitäten, wo diese ausgeübt wurden, nachzugehen. Auf Grundlage der Fundverteilungsbilder wurde die Diskussion um die

funktionale Ausrichtung und Organisation des Hofgeländes und der zugehörigen Parzelle sowie die Aktivitäten innerhalb dieser geführt. Die jüngere Bebauungsphase VIII erwies sich als besonders nützlich für die Diskussion. Die besseren Erhaltungsbedingungen erlaubten Aussagen über Hausform und Größe, und die Fundverteilungsbilder vermochten zur Rekonstruktion und Bauweise der Gebäude beizutragen und dadurch, die aus dem Befundbild abzuleitende Interpretation zu konkretisieren. Abfallzonen und Aktivitätsmuster werden auf Grundlage der Bebauung diskutiert.

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