Rethinking the Iron Age
ringforts of Öland
– Interpretations and new possibilities

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the ringforts of the island of Öland in the Baltic Sea off the coast of southeast Sweden. It provides a comprehensive and up-to-date catalogue of definite and possible Ölandic ringforts, and reviews the known archaeological evidence presented in this catalogue. It also critically evaluates existing interpretations of Ölandic ringforts, and in particular those associated with defence, conflict and violence. The dissertation emphasizes the significant weaknesses with such interpretations, and it is therefore argued that the discussion of ringforts should apply a more nuanced picture, in which other possibilities are not excluded from the debate. This dissertation, therefore, stresses that we need to rethink the Iron Age ringforts of Öland.

Key words: Öland, ringforts, hillforts, catalogue, analysis, Iron Age.

Cover picture: Sandby ringfort in perspective from the west. Photo: Jacob Holmring, 2014 (edited by Beata Holmring).

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Definitions

Stone Age (~1800 BC)
Bronze Age (1800 BC – 500 BC)
Iron Age (500 BC – 1050 AD)
Pre-Roman Iron Age (500 BC – 1 AD)
Roman Iron Age (1 – 375 AD)
Migration Period (375 – 550 AD)
Vendel era (550 – 800 AD)
Viking Age (800 – 1050 AD)
Middle Ages (1050 – 1500 AD)
Early Middle Ages (1050 – 1350 AD)
Late Middle Ages (1350 – 1527 AD)
(historiska.se/aldrejarnalder/ – 2013-09-20, historiska.se/yngrejarnalder/ – 2013-09-20
historiska.se/medeltid/ – 2014-03-03)
1. Introducing the archaeological material and defining the research issues

1.1 Introduction

The term “ringfort”, as used on the Swedish island of Öland, refers to a specific category of ancient monuments within the much broader category of “hillforts” (see e.g. Ambrosiani 1964; Olausson 1995). The latter is a category that in archaeological research has proven to be both pragmatic and enigmatic (Wall 2003:9). Pragmatic because the term itself in the archaeological discipline is most convenient, since it covers completely different kinds of structures constructed in very different temporal contexts. It is what could be called a typical umbrella term (Harding 2012:1). Enigmatic because there is much that still is unknown about these mysterious ancient monuments (see e.g. Olausson 1995; Wall 2003).

As defined by The Swedish National Heritage Board (Sw. Riksantikvarieämbetet, RAÄ) a hillfort is “an enclosed area of stone walls or earthworks next to natural barriers of precipices, verges, water, marshes etc. usually located on hilltops” (Selinge 1969:24) (my translation). This phenomenon appears across Scandinavia, but with a particularly high concentration in the region around Lake Mälaren.

Despite the definition, it is commonly acknowledged that hillforts in every case are neither topographically limited to elevation points, nor necessarily to be interpreted in a military context. The term is therefore not considered absolute. In addition, hillforts are chronologically not solely restricted to an Iron Age context. In terms of supposable date of construction, hillforts in Scandinavia have been dated from the late Bronze Age (ca. 1000 BC) to the Middle Ages (ca. 1300 AD), whereas a few have even been dated back to the Neolithic (ca. 2300-1800 BC). However, they are particularly conspicuous during the Iron Age (500 BC – 1050 AD), and especially during the Migration Period (375 – 550 AD) (Wall 2003:19; Andrén 2006:34; Harding 2012:1). As a consequence, hillforts, as both a category and as an ancient monument, have since the 1960s generally been established as a heterogeneous concept regarding morphology and chronology (see e.g. Ambrosiani 1964; Manneke 1979; Engström 1984; Johansen & Pettersson 1993; Olausson 1995; Johansen 1997; Cassel 1998; Wall 2003).

Interpretations of hillforts have varied profoundly during the more than a century of research that has been carried out on them. Since an overwhelming majority of the hillforts
have yielded very few or no finds. The contexts of these particular sites are highly unclear, which throughout the many decades of research has resulted in contradicting interpretations. For example, interpretations that, on the one hand, speak of hillforts as important elements of warfare, and on the other hand, interpretations that view hillforts as peaceful structures.

However, since the beginning of research into hillforts, the predominantly addressed interpretation of them has for the most part described them as ancient structures serving as places of refuge in times of turmoil and unrest during the Iron Age, and primarily the Migration Period. The Migration Period has in archaeological research often been characterized by its brutal and violent nature, with hillforts providing the necessary defence against the presumed martial threats of that time. This is the traditional interpretation of hillforts in archaeological research, and still the most commonly accepted one. However, during the more recent years of research of hillforts by archaeologists, there has been a tendency to instead place hillforts in certain ritual and religious contexts (Cassel 1998:130; Andrén 2006:33 f., 2014:86).

As mentioned above, on Öland the same kind of phenomenon appears, though there they are designated as ringforts. This is due to their differences in attributes in comparison to the hillforts on the Swedish mainland. On Öland the ringforts are, with only one exception, topographically located in the lowland, while the hillforts on the mainland are located on natural elevation points (cf. lowland forts, Gustafsson 2002:7 f.,17). In addition, unlike most of the other Scandinavian hillforts, where low stone walls dominate the construction, the Ölandic ringforts display the opposite with much higher and thicker stone walls. Whilst these 15-20 unusual ringforts on Öland account only for an almost insignificant proportion of the over 1500 recorded hillforts in Scandinavia, the differences in attributes are the main reason why Öland is particularly well-known for this phenomenon.

Despite this and the fact that there are 15 ringforts on Öland still visible in the landscape, where the majority of them even are considered quite well preserved, the existing research on several of these archaeological objects is limited. Many of the ringforts are either poorly investigated in terms of excavations, or have rendered relatively few results in such excavations. Our knowledge of these ancient monuments is therefore rather slim (Andrén 2006:33 f., 2014:77; Viberg et al. 2012:2.). One exception, however, is Öland’s most famous ringfort, Eketorp, which was totally excavated in the years 1964-1974 (Borg et al. 1976; Näsman & Wegraeus 1979).

Even though some of the Ölandic ringforts later on were reused in the Middle Ages, they
have all during the course of research been confined to an Iron Age context (Andrén 2006:33 f., 2014:77 f.).

Due to recent excavations in the Sandby ringfort on the east coast of Öland, discoveries have been made picturing clear traces of violence, including massacres occurring in the Migration Period around 1500 years ago (kalmarlansmuseum.se – 2013-12-05). This newly acquired information appears, however, to have the effect of consolidating the traditional interpretations of Ölandic ringforts by continuing to place them in contexts of defence and conflict. Whilst this lies in contrast to the overall current research situation regarding hillforts, that is, however, not the case with the ringforts on Öland. Regarding these structures, the traditional interpretations, which view them in terms of defence, conflict and violence, are still recognized in archaeological research. Nevertheless, this is to be regarded as problematic. In this dissertation it is argued that there are some significant weaknesses with such interpretations. It is therefore stressed that the discussion of ringforts should be more nuanced, where other possibilities are not excluded from the debate. Hence, we should rethink the Iron Age ringforts of Öland.

1.2 Aims

The aim of this dissertation is to conduct a comprehensive survey of the archaeological evidence known from the Ölandic ringforts. This will also include a critical evaluation of existing interpretations of ringforts, and in particular those where they have mainly been interpreted in terms of defence, conflict and violence, as other possibilities will be suggested and discussed. The aim is also to produce a comprehensive and up-to-date catalogue of all of the Ölandic ringforts, which will constitute the foundation of the survey.

1.3 Research questions

- What is possible to deduce archaeologically from the source material of the Ölandic ringforts regarding geographical and topographical locations, relation to surrounding settlements and environmental attributes, appearance and attributes, finds, and dates of construction, dates of use and dates of abandonment?
- Does this archaeological deduction primarily substantiate the plausibility of existing interpretations of Ölandic ringforts, or does it rather support new possibilities? Depending on which case: why?
1.4 Method

The method of this dissertation is to review the archaeological evidence known from the context of the Ölandic ringforts by analyzing and cross-analyzing that evidence through different aspects and perspectives, which may have shaped the function and meaning of the ringforts. With this survey the existing interpretations, and in particular those where the ringforts mainly have been interpreted in terms of defence, conflict and violence, is to be critically evaluated in order to emphasize the weaknesses with these interpretations, and, thus, suggest and discuss new possibilities.

In order to complement this analysis, I have visited Öland and carried out visual investigations of nine of the Ölandic ringforts: Bårby, Gråborg, Hässleby, Ismantorp, Löt, Mossberga, Sandby, Triberga and Vannborga.

1.5 Source material

The source material of this dissertation primarily constitutes the published and unpublished records of archaeological surveys and excavations at Ölandic ringforts. According to the Swedish digital register of prehistoric remains, FMIS (fornminnesinformationssystem), there are 22 ringforts recorded on Öland. However, some of these data recordings are false, being
due to a misreading of an old cadastral map in the 19th century and some questionable interpretations (Fallgren 2008:119). This number should therefore be regarded as incorrect.

My research has identified 20 either definite or possible ringforts on Öland for analysis. One further example is possible, hence, changing the number to 21 (see fig. 1), but will not be included in the catalogue. It will, nevertheless, be dealt with in that same chapter and will be included in the chapter which follows. That ringfort is the possible past existence of a ringfort in Borgholm (see page 28).

Due to the complexity of Eketorp ringfort and Gråborg ringfort, with their huge amount of finds and different contexts over time, these two will unfortunately not be dealt with in this dissertation as much as they might have deserved.

1.6 Background

From here follows the background of the Ölandic ringforts in terms of previous and existing interpretations, the archaeological material itself, and the conditions on Öland. However, in studying the Ölandic ringforts it is necessary to not focus exclusively on the mutual geographical context of the ringforts, but also to widen the perspectives and consider other contexts. Hence, a considerable part of this chapter deals with hillforts in the rest of Scandinavia, and in particular those on the Swedish mainland.

1.6.1 Hillforts: the archaeological material and the concept

As mentioned above, hillforts appear across Scandinavia. They are concentrated along the east coast of Sweden and the west coasts of Sweden and Norway (see fig. 2). On the east coast they range from northern Småland to the central regions of Norrland, and on the west coast they range from northern Halland in Sweden to Trøndelag in Norway. They appear around the Lakes Mälaren and Vänern and in the interior of southern Norway. They are also found on the Baltic islands of Bornholm, Gotland and naturally Öland, where they mainly are referred to as ringforts. Finland, though not strictly a valid part of Scandinavia, has also hillforts in its southwest region.

By far the highest concentration occurs in the region around Lake Mälaren, or more precisely Södermanland, which includes the southern part of Mälaren. While there are over 1500 recorded hillforts in Scandinavia, and approximately 1040 solely recorded in Sweden, over 300 of them are situated in Södermanland (see fig. 2) (Wall 2003:19 f.; Andrén 2014:84).
Hillforts vary considerably both in form and in date. Their form range from inconspicuous stone walls and small enclosed areas to quite massive walls and fairly large enclosed areas (Cassel 1998:129). For example, in size they can range from enclosed areas of about 50 metres in diametre to covering 1.2 km², and in wall height they can range from being virtually levelled to the ground to about 2 metres. Depending on the topography of the site, the form of the hillforts varies profoundly. The stone walls were constructed along the least precipitous parts of the hills and cliffs, whereas the more precipitous and steeper slopes of the hilltops were utilized as natural demarcations. The location always involves some form of surrounding or proximity to minor or major rivers or lakes. Due to this, the stone walls of hillforts often display a semicircular shape (Olausson 2009:42 f.). Usually there are one or two entrances. However, there are exceptions, such as Torsburgen on Gotland, which is one of the largest in Scandinavia, where there are at least twelve gates (Engström 1984; Andrén 2014:85).

The date of hillforts range from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages (Cassel 1998:129). Many times these are established through datable finds discovered within them, or from the prehistoric sea level rise. However, modern dating methods have broadened this chronological
range, for example through carbon-14 and lichenometry. The latter is lichen chronology on exposed rock of the masonry. Whilst this has broadened the chronological range of hillforts, such modern dating methods are, nonetheless, rather inexact, often with uncertainties of a few or even several hundred years.

In terms of methodology, the dating of hillforts is much-disputed and problematic. It is difficult to separate the dates of construction from the dates of usage and later abandonment. Further difficulties arise in distinguishing the chronological relation between the stone walls and the cultural layers from that of graves and finds within hillforts (Johansen & Pettersson 1993:28).

In some cases hillforts appear to have been abandoned and then reused over the course of time. In other cases some hillforts seem to have only been used for a relatively short time. The shortage of datable finds within hillforts is also problematic when trying to understand this particular phenomenon (Wall 1998:143).

During the 17th century an organized inventory of prehistoric remains began in Sweden, which naturally even included hillforts. They were back then referred to as simply forts (Sw. borg). Even though many people during the 1600s were fully aware of these peculiar stone enclosures in the terrain, they did not know why or when they had been constructed. They were, nevertheless, strongly believed to be of ancient origin, and were primarily viewed as fortifications. Whilst they were mostly spoken of as ancient structures built by humans, some people even believed that they had been constructed and inhabited by giants (Johansen & Pettersson 1993:14; Wall 2003:32).

Contemporary Scandinavian sources mentioning fortifications of ancient origin are very rare. The Rö runestone in Tanum, Bohuslän, could be the oldest written evidence for hillforts in Sweden. It has been dated to the 5th century, and mentions the word StainawarijaR, which has been interpreted as meaning The defender of the fort (Sw. borgförsvararen). Four hundred years later the archbishop of Hamburg describes in his chronicle how the inhabitants of Birka fled up to the “fort” during a hostile assault (Johansen & Pettersson 1993:18).

It was not until the mid-19th century when systematic analysis on Scandinavian hillforts really began. For a thorough review of the research history of hillforts see Olausson 1995, chapter 2. The term “hillfort”, which later became the accepted archaeological classification of such ancient monuments, was mentioned for the first time in an article from 1881. It was a classification which then included all kinds of stone enclosures. Many of these can hardly be regarded as regular fortifications, due to their lack of any military attributes.
This later led to a need to extract the “false hillforts” from the classification, so that it only included “true” fortifications. Hence, new classifications and concepts were created for the excluded hillforts. The most continuously used classifications in archaeological research, besides hillforts, are bank enclosure (Sw. vallanläggning) and grave enclosure (Sw. gravhågnad), which are due to certain types of attributes and finds. This distinguishing task became important for archaeologists working in hillfort research (Wall 2003:21 f.).

Another important task in archaeological research was to divide hillforts into different groups depending on topographical and functional attributes. Groups as e.g. farledsborgar (En. fairway forts), tillflyktsborgar (En. refuge forts), boplatsborgar (En. settlement forts), höjdborgar (En. forts on heights), flatmarksborgar (En. forts in the lowland), myrborgar (En. forts by marshes), were, thus, created (Cassel 1998:131; Wall 1998:144) (my translations).

The importance of influences from the Roman Empire during the Early Iron Age, regarding both material and ideology, has been stressed by many researchers over the years. The most obvious influence is in the huge amount of imported status objects, such as glassware, weapons, bronzes and gold rings. There is, however, also certain evidence of Roman influences in social organization in Scandinavia, though in different regions and on different levels.

This seemingly clear connection to the Roman Empire presumably influenced to varying degrees the function and architecture (i.e. shape, plan and inner layout) of hillforts, since similarities between them and Roman models occur in the source material. For instance, there are many indications of such influences to be seen in the form of models/prototypes, aesthetical programmes and systems of measurement applied in various types of building technology and houses in Scandinavia, both within hillforts and in contemporary settlements (Olausson 1997:159 ff., 2009:55). The discussion of Roman influences on Scandinavian hillforts has, however, mainly concerned the ringforts on Öland. This has also included possible Byzantine influences, due to finds, and a few noticed similarities in attributes (see e.g. Werner 1949; Herschend 1985:165 f.; Näsman 1989:129 f.).

Such architecture similarities are, however, probably not primarily due to direct Roman influences. If hillforts were strongly influenced by Roman models and contacts with the Roman Empire, it was probably not a question of replication, but rather notions of a conceptual and intellectual borrowing, striving to emulate the lifestyle of the Roman elite. Whilst hillforts were subject to contemporary Roman influences to some degree, the basic conditions for these constructions probably foremost emerged locally within each community.
Similar evidences of Roman influences on hillforts is found in the British Isles, though usually at an earlier date (see e.g. Harding 2012). However, despite rich source material, discussion of Scandinavian hillforts is rarely mirrored by the equivalent debate in Great Brittan. Sometimes similarities have been noticed regarding the high occurrence of hillforts with low ramparts, and the fact that many hillforts were erected during the Migration Period. However, the conditions have been emphasized do differ on the British Isles in comparison to Scandinavia, where for example several older Celtic hillforts were reused after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire during the 5th century.

The Alamannian forts on the eastern side of Rhine but close to the Roman limes, have been used as references to Scandinavian hillforts, and some parallels have been drawn with Baltic, Slavic and other Continental counterparts (Olausson 2009:39,44,55 f.). The Scandinavian debate appears, however, to continue more in isolation, where archaeologists from different countries, studying hillforts in their own country, do not refer to each other as much as one might have expected.

The age determinations and interpretations of hillforts that were formulated in the early days of research are still topical in current archaeological research. Since hillforts primarily are found within contexts clearly related to Iron Age settlements, it was concluded that they were constructed in the Iron Age. The early view of them as military facilities has generally been accepted by contemporary archaeologists as fact.

Since hillforts are frequently located in the periphery of contemporary settlements, which are geographical areas characterized as outfields and wilderness, they were interpreted as temporary places of refuge (Johansen & Pettersson 1993:23). The significance of a peripheral location in relation to surrounding settlements could be explained on the basis that such structures only are used when necessary, for example if they needed to provide a solid defence and a refuge place against hostile intruders. Their relatively simple and uncomplicated construction added also to the interpretation of a temporary usage context, with the explanation that a place one only needs to maintain temporarily does not require a construction of any extraordinary character (Olausson 1997:158; Wall 2003:21,33).

However, the reason for this peripheral location could simply be due to the fact that cultivation, and therefore also settlement, near to the hillfort would have been constrained by the unfavourable terrain. The topographical and peripheral location could also be viewed as providing the necessary visual command over the surrounding terrain and communication
routes, such as by land and water (Olausson 2009:44).

This could be seen as a reasonable reflection, since high terrain indeed provides an overviewing advantage over the surrounding landscape, giving the hillfort a completely different kind of control than it would have had if instead been placed lower down in the terrain. Another possibility is the intention of making the fort conspicuous to its surroundings.

One explanation to why hillforts were so strongly believed to have had a military function could have been due to the political and ideological situation in which it was written. The climate in the late 19th century and early 20th century was characterized by the prevalent need for a strong national unity, as well as the nation was hardened by global war and international tension. A temporal context like this could very well have generated military interpretations (Olausson 1995:9 f., 1997:158).

Opinions and interpretations suggesting hill forts as permanent settlements circulated early on in archaeological research (see e.g. Anjou 1935). However, this did not become more broadly recognized for some hillforts until the late 1950s, when increasingly more archaeological investigations were conducted in and around hillforts, where house remains and ample cultural layers were discovered. Nonetheless, the majority of the hillforts appear to lack clear evidence of human activity within the enclosed site, as the hillforts containing house remains are in clear minority (Johansen & Pettersson 1993:24,29; Olausson 1995:22 f., 2009:44 ff.).

In such investigations some hillforts in the provinces of Uppland, Södermanland and Östergötland displayed occupation layers, where food remains, pottery, craft waste and sporadic dress artefacts were found (Andrén 2014:85). Some of these hillforts, which were subject to even later archaeological investigations and excavations, were Darsgärdeborgen in Skederid parish, Uppland (Ambrosiani 1964), Havor hillfort in Hablingbo parish, Gotland (Manneke 1979), Torsburgen, also on Gotland (Engström 1984), and more recently Runsa hillfort in Ed parish, Uppland (Olausson 2011).

Hillforts were commonly viewed as concerning entire neighbouring communities and larger political regions, instead of being the results of individual manifestations in the landscape (Johansen & Pettersson 1993:29). This seems a reasonable interpretation, since such constructions would have involved the cooperation of large number of people from neighbouring villages.

The geographical location of hillforts, for example regularly situated along fairways, has also been interpreted as a phenomenon governed on a high level of organization, which would
have involved a larger region of communities. The defence measures (i.e. constructing hillforts) must, therefore, have been intended to meet external threats (see e.g. Stenberger 1933; Schnell 1934; Ambrosiani 1964; Näsman 1997). This may explain why the interpretation of hillforts as an expression of internal conflicts and intrigues among neighbouring communities has not received much attention in archaeological research in relation to hillforts as expressions of meeting external threats (Johansen & Pettersson 1993:29 ff.).

Hillforts have, nonetheless, been widely interpreted and discussed as material reflections of intrigues between competitive and adversarial neighbouring communities (see e.g. Nihlén & Boëthius 1933:24 and Olausson 1997, 2009). They have even been viewed as foundations for instigating external assaults, or regarded as assembly places for men who carried weapons, or even as places of refuge for the non-combatant inhabitants (see e.g. Stenberger 1933; Nordén 1938; Nerman 1941; Mitlid 2003). Whilst some researchers have interpreted hillforts as fortified farms or constructions of a defensive character, which were built at manors of individual ambitions (see e.g. Ambrosiani 1964; Olausson 1997, 2009), others have stressed that they imply political divisions of minor regional political units, which were the predecessors of the impending medieval realms of Sweden and Norway (see e.g. Hyenstrand 1981; Damell 1993).

Whilst discussion of hillforts has for the most part concerned concepts of fortification and defence, which were considered particularly crucial during the presumed times of unrest and turmoil of the Middle Iron Age, debate has also included remarks questioning such concepts (e.g. Johansen & Pettersson 1993; Olausson 1995; Johansen 1997; Cassel 1998; Wall 2003). This was first brought to light in the 1920s and 1930s, when contemporary archaeologists began to question the interpretations of some particular hillforts. They stressed that these must have had more purposes than strictly military. For example, the names of some hillforts (e.g. Onssten, Puksten, Torsklin and Visten) could indicate contexts surrounded by cultic activities. This was further supported by emphasizing the construction of the stone walls, which were often considerably lacking in defence capabilities, and the central location of erratic boulders, sometimes depicting cup marks within a few hillforts, which appeared to lack clear function. Consequently some hillforts were interpreted as cultic forts (Sw. *kultborgar*), or regular fortifications which also served cultic purposes (Stenberger 1933: 241 f.; Schnell 1934:36 f.; Nordén 1938: 338 f.).

Other non-military interpretations have also occurred in archaeological research, where the
non-martial finds from hillforts have received greater attention. These interpretations speak of hillforts as, for example, spatially delimited production sites, as enclosed areas for people possessing some kind of position of power or esoteric knowledge, as temporary rendezvous for people who primarily lived by keeping livestock, and as delimited centers where people from different areas met and traded gifts with one another (Hegardt 1991: 62 ff.; Törnqvist 1993; Cassel 1998:145 ff.; Andrén 2014:87).

Despite the occurrence of different interpretations in archaeological research, and that the mid-20th century resulted in an increased number of archaeological investigations of hillforts, the interpretations during the greater part of the 20th century still predominantly circled around the themes of defence and warfare (Johansen & Pettersson 1998:23 ff.). Michael Olausson (1995) argues that this is because the old interpretations were “mentally blocking” new ideas and interpretations about hillforts from emerging. He also argues that the very concept “hillfort” is problematic, since it generates preconceived meanings of fortification, warfare and defence, inhibiting other functions. Olausson can be seen as an advocate for a new direction in archaeological research of hillforts. In his dissertation he thoroughly investigates hillforts in the region around Lake Mälaren, where he focuses on separating different kinds of stone enclosures and dating them. He created a chronological and typological model of stone enclosures in the region around Lake Mälaren, concluding that hillforts primarily was constructed during two main periods; 1300 BC – 400 BC and 300 AD – 600 AD (1995:8,157). This conclusion opposes the previous age determinations of hillforts, showing that they could have been constructed before the “presumably dire and critical times of the Middle Iron Age”.

In recent decades archaeologists have begun more actively to distance themselves from traditional military interpretations of hillforts, often moving towards interpretations of a more religious and ritual character (Andrén 2006:34). Attributes, finds and contextual relations have been stressed more recently in archaeological research to indicate the religious and ritual roles hillforts might to have played in the conceptual world of contemporary people (see e.g. Johansen 1997; Cassel 1998; Wall 2003).

Whilst the primary function of these structures is to enclose a specific area by for example a stone wall that does not necessarily have to imply that the site is fortified in a military sense. All forms of enclosures by walls or ramparts throughout time have yielded different kinds of functions and meanings, for example church walls or altar rails (Olausson 1995:45 f.).

The presence of graves within hillforts, the erratic boulders depicting cup marks within
them, place-names indicating sacral meanings in presumed association with hillforts, and the apparent lacking of any defence capabilities in the construction of the often low stone walls could indicate functions of a symbolic, cultic and judicial nature. The stone walls would, therefore, not have been intended to withstand hostile incursions of minor or larger scale. They would instead have physically and symbolically marked some form of socially, religiously, ritually or legally enclosed assembly places for the surrounding communities, where certain ceremonies were performed (Johansen 1997; Wall 2003; Olausson 2009:48; Andrén 2014:87).

Since the very concept “hillfort” is so generic and deeply loaded, it has been stressed that the concept in reality should be abolished and replaced (Olausson 1995:8). Other more neutral and broader concepts, as “enclosed spaces” (Sw. “avgränsningar/-begränsningar av områden”) and “hedged mountains” (Sw. “hägnade berg”), have been presented in the more recent years of research, with the intention of emphasizing the diversity of this phenomenon (see Johansen & Pettersson 1993; Wall 2003).

Such concepts could be regarded as active attempts to try to “demilitarize” this phenomenon, in the context of a more modern political and ideological climate, where warfare is no longer seen as desirable or prestigious. The possible military aspect of hillforts could be seen as belittled and excluded from contemporary discussion of the interpretation of hillforts (cf. Keeley 1995; Carman 1997).

The presence of non-military finds, which have been detected in several hillforts, does not in itself imply that they had non-military functions, since the simple principle of maintaining armed forces requires a certain non-martial (i.e. “civilian”) element. Logistics, maintenance and provisions are crucial for sustaining any fighting force, whatever the temporal context might be. In any garrison, the presence of civilians, such as craftsmen, merchants, and even the warrior’s families, have always been a significant element in its preservation. It is also reasonable to assume that warriors would be mainly occupied in routine maintenance work (Albrethsen 1997:212 ff.; Olausson 2009:55).

The fact that several hillforts in Scandinavia display clear traces of having been burnt, and in many cases even at several different occasions, also rebuilt, could support the military interpretations, where a hostile enemy destroys a hillfort after first conquering it. In some cases the destruction of hillforts is so extreme that it suggests a “ritual obliteration of the enemy” (Olausson 2009:59). In other cases the stone walls were so heavily burnt that parts of the stones had even begun to melt. However, such vitrified walls have also been interpreted as
a building technique used to strengthen the walls (see e.g. Kresten & Ambrosiani 1992).

Historical records from 600-800 AD in Scotland speak of contemporary Scottish hillforts that were subjected to sieges, fire or destructions in association to the context of warfare. However, these texts do not state if this was in the context of sieges or pitched battles. Nevertheless, it would seem clear that the Scottish hillforts played a significant strategic role in contexts of warfare (Olausson 2009:57 f.; Andrén 2014:88 f.).

Whether the same interpretation can be applied to the burnt Scandinavian hillforts is, however, impossible to say. All the same, the application of burning the enemy’s estates and properties in association to warfare was a well-tried and practiced tactic during the Iron Age and even the Middle Ages. It was also generally accepted and even expected as a strategy of warfare. A famous example of this is when William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066 AD, where he burnt and plundered the English countryside as he and his army advanced (Olausson 2009:59). This strategy of warfare applies, however, also to most wars and armed conflicts that have occurred even in recent history.

Whilst Scandinavian hillforts appear to display traces of warlike activities, this interpretation is complicated by the peculiar absence of hillforts in the agricultural areas of central Västergötland, western Östergötland and the southern parts of Scandinavia (see fig. 2). If hillforts indeed played a defensive role, why would they be absent in these regions of otherwise large and densely organized contemporary settlements? In addition, several hillforts were constructed in areas containing small settlements or irregular organized settlements of larger scale. This would indicate that hillforts were not of crucial military importance. The local interface between hillforts and settlements of the “hillfort-absent” parts of Scandinavia could therefore not have existed. Hence, a particular social requirement appears to have met with the demand of constructing hillforts in areas where there was divided use of land and settlement (Fallgren 1993; Wall 2003; Andrén 2014:90).

1.6.2 Province description and topography

Öland is Sweden’s second largest island and the largest in the Baltic Sea after Gotland and Saaremaa (Sw. Ösel). The Kalmar Strait separates Öland from the mainland, and the island is uncontestably the smallest of the provinces of Sweden. It is mostly quite flat, with the highest point being at Rösslösa in the western reach (Sw. västra landborgen) only 58 metres above sea level. The island is 137 km long and only approximately 16 km at its widest point, meaning that anywhere on Öland you are within eight km of the sea.
Geologically the island consists mostly of a limestone rock slightly sloping to the southeast. Its northern part has a quite distinctive and very barren coastal strip, while its middle part consists of a rather deep and fertile soil, which is classified as brown earth. The island’s central region is dominated by the deciduous forest, Mittlandsskogen (En. The mid-land forest, my translation), which is one of the largest in northern Europe. The southern part of the island is characterized by the great limestone pavement known as the Great Alvar (Sw. Stora alvaret), which constitutes almost 1/3 of the surface of Öland. (Gustafsson 2002:2).

1.6.3 The Ölandic ringforts

Hillforts and ringforts have throughout the research history generally been interpreted as a result of different external influences, conflict and violence (Bradley 1993:4), which in turn has generated interpretations of military and defensive contexts. In the case of Öland, this is most explicit. The Ölandic ringforts have always been interpreted by archaeologists as places of refuge in times of turmoil and unrest.

In comparison to the hillforts on the Scandinavian mainland, the differences in appearance was initially explained by the simple fact that the consistently flat terrain on Öland deemed it necessary to construct high and closed stone walls. Their seemingly strategic location close to wetlands also encouraged interpretations of fortification and defence. With the lack of natural elevation points in the terrain, which would have provided easily defended grounds, the contemporary people were thereby forced to compensate for such shortages. This would explain the more obvious differences in appearance and in attributes in comparison to the hillforts on the mainland (Stenberger 1933:213 f.; Wegraeus 1976:33 f.; Näsman 1997:148 ff.). Such reasoning has been pervasive in most archaeological research on Ölandic ringforts.

The bulk of research on Ölandic ringforts has been conducted by the Swedish archaeologist Mårten Stenberger. His dissertation from 1933, Öland under äldre järnåldern (En. Öland during the Early Iron Age) deals with their construction, prototypes, origin and dating (Wegraeus 1976:33). Stenberger’s dissertation was the first where archaeology and human geography were combined through analysis of ringforts, stone walls (i.e. within the context of stone wall systems and stone wall settlement districts) (Sw. stensträngar, stensträngssystem, stensträngsbygd), farms, villages and even cemeteries. His conclusions became influential in the continuation of research onto both hillforts and ringforts, and the archaeology of ancient settlements (Olausson 1995:26). The interpretations Stenberger formulated more than 80 years ago about the Ölandic ringforts remain the traditional and
generally recognized interpretations in archaeological research of this particular phenomenon (Andrén 2006:33), and have a lasting impact on current archaeological research.

These military interpretations involving defence, conflict and violence have been supported by weaponry deposits on the island. The largest wetland sacrifice in Sweden is the nowadays drained fen of Skedemosse on central Öland, which lies close to the possible Sörby ringfort (see fig. 1). This site appears to have from the Pre-Roman Iron Age into the Viking Age functioned as a ritual place, where both humans and animals, most commonly horses, were sacrificed. However, the site is also the largest wetland sacrifice of military equipment in Sweden, which occurred from the late 2nd century well into the 5th century (see Monikander 2010). This form of weapon deposits is also known as “war-booty sacrifices”, which primarily are found in southern Scandinavia, especially in present-day Denmark (Andrén 2014:92).

This war-booty sacrifice site on Öland has been used in archaeological research to further support the interpretation of Ölandic ringforts as fortifications, where the weapons deposited there were interpreted as once belonging to invading aggressors defeated in battle on the island (see e.g. Näsman 1997). This is, however, understandable, since war-booty sacrifices, which mainly are found in southern Scandinavia, and especially in Denmark, have been used in order to study prehistoric warfare. In archaeological research they are often interpret as reflections of a centralized military organization waging warfare on a much larger scale than prior in prehistory (Andrén 2014:92 f.). It is also understandably to notice a connection between Ölandic ringforts and the war-booty sacrifice of Skedemosse, since they correspond in date. The latter, as mentioned above, being dated between late 2nd century AD and well into 5th century AD and the former being supposedly dated between 3rd century AD and 5th century AD in terms of dates of construction (see e.g. Stenberger 1933; Wegraeus 1976; Näsman 1997; Fallgren 2008; Viberg et al. 2012; Andrén 2014).

The ringforts on Öland which have achieved most of the attention in archaeological research are those at Eketorp, Gråborg and Ismantorp, and especially Eketorp (Olausson 1995:26).

The site of the Eketorp ringfort was totally excavated in the years 1964-1974, which was at the time the largest archaeological project ever carried out in Sweden. The excavations yielded more than 25 000 finds, detailed information of interior and exterior structures and provided a clear picture of the history of the site. The Eketorp project later resulted in several different archaeological research publications (see e.g. Borg et al. 1976; Boessneck et al. 1979; Näsman & Wegraeus 1979; Näsman 1984; Borg 1998; Telldahl 2012).
After the excavations the Eketorp site was reconstructed based on the interpretations of the schematics of the ringfort. One part of the reconstruction project was to build a museum in the centre of the ringfort with Iron Age and Middle Age houses, while another was to build a five metre high stone wall with a crenulated parapet (Engström 2012:84 f.).

According to the publications about Eketorp ringfort, it had three main construction phases with different primary functions: Eketorp I, II and III. Eketorp I is dated to 300-400 AD and interpreted to have functioned primarily as a refuge place in times of unrest, Eketorp II is dated to 400-700 AD and interpreted to have functioned mainly as a fortified farm, and Eketorp III is dated to 1170-1250 AD and interpreted to have functioned as a military garrison. Also interesting to note is the more than 400 years of abandonment the ringfort underwent, before it was reused in the Middle Ages. Other ringforts that were entirely reused at this time was those at Bårby, Gråborg and Triberga. Vedby ringfort was most probably also reused, which is indicated through certain attributes belonging to the structure (Borg 1998:12; Fallgren 2008:124; Olausson 2009:40).

The ringforts at Gråborg and Ismantorp have received much attention in archaeological research due to their special characteristics. Gråborg is by far the largest ringfort on Öland and one of the largest examples of such objects in Scandinavia. It also has a long usage time, including finds as late as from the Early modern period (ca. 1527-1700 AD) (see Tegnér et al. 2008). Ismantorp is exceptional for its high state of preservation and its spectacular display of nine gateways (see Andrén 2014).

Much research has been carried out on Ismantorp ringfort, which probably is due to its display of nine gates. This strikingly high number of gateways has in archaeological research been viewed as a problem, since that many gates would not have been suitable for defence (Wegraeus 1976:40). Even Stenberger suggested that Ismantorp must have had other functions than the purely defensive. The ringfort could perhaps on certain occasions have functioned as a central ritual site and on other as a place of refuge in times of unrest (Stenberger 1933:235 ff.). Ismantorp has through the many years of research been subject to multiple different interpretations. Such interpretations have suggested the ringfort to have functioned as, for example, an institution for priests and temple ministrants, a marketplace or trading centre, and a fold for sorting out animals (Wegraeus 1976:40 f.).

The most recent research of Ismantorp has been done by Anders Andrén (2014), who dismisses traditional interpretations of the ringfort as refuge place and central ritual site. Instead he interprets the Ismantorp ringfort as a sporadically used army camp with clear
influences from Roman models, but also inscribed with a cosmological meaning based on own traditions and practices of a pre-Christian religion. Ismantorp could, in other words, be seen as a hybrid between Roman models and local practices and traditions. As army camps they would have functioned as assembly places for men and training grounds in order to organize war (ibid 2014).

Usually it is held in archaeological research that there are 15 definite ringforts on Öland; all of which are quite spatially evenly spread straight across the island (Fallgren 2008:119; Telldahl 2012:13). Although they all are in different states of preservation, they are, nevertheless, still visible in the landscape (Viberg et al. 2012:2). The Svarteberga ringfort is almost entirely destroyed through centuries of cultivation. Only the northern part of the ringfort remains. The Vannborga ringfort is in a similar state, though, due to much earlier periods of cultivation, and is visible only as a base of a stone wall almost levelled to the ground (Stenberger 1933:248; Wegraeus 1976:39).

Two additional ringforts occur in the archaeological literature, although, often labeled as possible ringforts. One is the stone-wall enclosed plateau in Brostorp in the parish of Glömminge, which was investigated for the first time in 1928. The other one is the construction at Höggkullbacken within Ullevi estates in the parish of Gårdby, which was inventoried for the first time in 1941 (Fallgren 2008:119). Sometimes the latter is referred to as “Höggkullbacken” or “Gårdby borg” (alltpaoland.com/gardby-borg/ – 2014-02-05).

Due to their characteristic attributes and contextual differences, from the definite ringforts, these sites have seldom been included or dealt with in previous archaeological analysis amongst the Ölandic ringforts (Fallgren 2008:119 f.). However, Brostorp has yet once been dated to probably 200-400 AD, which was concluded after a minor excavation of the site in 1928 (Stenberger 1933:111; Wegraeus 1976:43). The characteristics of Brostorp appear as a conical platform of clay fenced by a low stone wall or a simple chain of stones rather than a clearly defined courtyard (Stenberger 1933:111). These characteristics differ sharply from the definite Ölandic ringforts, why Brostorp has usually been excluded from analysis of these phenomena (Fallgren 2008:119).

The characteristics of Gårdby borg (size and appearance) (Stenberger 1966:39 and Fallgren 2008:120), are reminiscent of a medieval fortified farm or rather a so called “motte and bailey structure” (for a thorough description of such constructions see Olsson et al. 2006:25); hence, the supposedly medieval context. Besides, Gårdby borg displays a completely different spatial location and relation to the surrounding agriculture settlements than the prehistorical ringforts
on Öland (see Fallgren 2008:199 f.).

Of the 20 definite and possible ringforts on Öland, three are known only from historical sources, partition instruments and place names on maps (Wegraeus 1976:39; Fallgren 2008:120; Viberg et al. 2012:2; Andrén 2014:77). One of them is mentioned in Nicholaus Vallinus’ book De Oelandia from 1703, who claimed that an ancient fort was located at Sörby in the parish of Gärdslösa. Such a fort has, however, never yet been rediscovered, although it could be possible that a ringfort once was located in a forested area between the estates of Sörby, Tjusby and Störlinge. Dense vegetation in combination with a poor state of preservation could possibly be the reason to why it never has been rediscovered if it ever had existed (Hagberg 1967:91).

The other two, Åkersberga and Östra Vässby, are deduced from partition instruments and estate names. On 17th and 18th century maps of Nyby village in the parish of Källa, which is close to Åkersberga, the names Borgtegarna, Borrängarna and Stora borrängarna appear in its vicinity. Other names including the word “borg” are also found in the proximities of other ringforts on Öland, such as Bårby (Borghorforma) and Vannborga (Borgåkern and Borrängen); hence, indicating the past presence of a ringfort in the parish of Källa. From various circumstances it has been argued that the ringfort could have been located on the flattened moraine hill of Åkersberga, situated in the vicinity of Borgtegarna. The size (60-80 metre in diametre) of the prehistoric cemetery on the site roughly corresponds to the size of the other ringforts on Öland. Hence, this could be the remains of a past ringfort on the site. The fact that this ringfort may be severely ruined nowadays is supported by the fact that both Svarteberga ringfort and Vannborga ringfort are now almost obliterated through many centuries of cultivation (Wegraeus 1976:39; Fallgren 2008:120). On the contrary, however, there are still remains of a cemetery on the site in Åkersberga, composing of about 25 stone circles, so this could be regarded as problematic. There is also no similar example on Öland, where ringforts have been used as a cemetery, and certainly not of this appearance.

Furthermore, the words borg (En. fort) and berg (En. rock, or rocky hill) are related to each other. Originally the word borg means “a platform resembling hilltop with steep sides” (my translation) (see Agertz 2008:68). There are several cases where names containing the word borg is also linked to folktales about old fortifications, although, often reveled to lack veracity. The Ölandic western reach, which in Swedish is called västra landborgen, is a perfect example of how the word borg and berg are given the same meaning, since it equally well could have been called västra landberget (En. The western land-rock) (Agertz 2008:68;
Erlandsson 2010:21). Hence, the name “Åkersberga” could in fact be due to the hilltop itself, where the cemetery is located, instead of a preexisting ringfort.

Here remains the possibility of a ringfort in Östra Vässby in the parish of Föra, because similar names to the ones at Åkersberga are present on maps in this area as well; names like *Borgängarna* and *Borgängen*. The latter was located next to the long since drained marsh Ormkärr (earlier named *Gärdesmossen*). Approximately 100 metres and 250 metres north of Ormkärr are two somewhat massive banks located, which could be the remains of ruined walls from a ringfort. All this could therefore indicate the past presence of a ringfort in the area (Fallgren 2008:120).

The possible existence of the ringforts of Sörby, Östra Vässby and Åkersberga could also be supported by the fact that they substantially fill out the otherwise somewhat peculiar gap of known ringforts in relation to the extensive agricultural settlements of the “surroundings of Skedemosse” and the northern part of Öland (see fig. 5) (Näsman 1997:152 f.; Fallgren 2008:120).
## 2. Catalogue of the Ölandic ringforts

Table 1: The Ölandic ringforts (alphabetical order), part I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ringfort</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Surrounding terrain</th>
<th>Distance to the closest Iron Age settlement</th>
<th>M.A.S.L.*</th>
<th>Distance to sea</th>
<th>RAA number</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bärby</td>
<td>Mörljungen</td>
<td>Crest of plane esker, edge of the western reach, cultivated area</td>
<td>1000 – 2000 m</td>
<td>ca. 44</td>
<td>ca. 2800 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 17:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eketorp</td>
<td>Gräsgård</td>
<td>Plane alvar area, earlier swamp areas to the north, east and south, a waterhole to the east, a bit higher terrain than the surroundings</td>
<td>Less than 1000 m</td>
<td>ca. 7</td>
<td>ca. 1700 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 45:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gräborg</td>
<td>Algutsrum</td>
<td>Plane moraine area surrounded by swamp areas, cultivated area</td>
<td>2000 – 3000 m</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>ca. 6800 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 16:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hässleby</td>
<td>Köping</td>
<td>Plane limestone platform, cultivated area, grazing land</td>
<td>Less than 1000 m (very close)</td>
<td>ca. 19</td>
<td>ca. 2300 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 111:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ismantorp</td>
<td>Långlöt</td>
<td>Plane area of moraine clay, pasture area, swamp areas, a waterhole to the north, higher terrain than the surroundings</td>
<td>ca. 1000 m</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>ca. 6600 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 30:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenstad</td>
<td>Torslunda</td>
<td>Crest of plane moraine ridge surrounded by drained swamp areas from 3 directions, forest area, cultivated area</td>
<td>ca. 1000 m</td>
<td>ca. 35</td>
<td>ca. 6100 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 9:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Löt</td>
<td>Löt</td>
<td>Cultivated area, swamp area to the north</td>
<td>ca. 1000 m</td>
<td>ca. 11</td>
<td>ca. 2300 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 29:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mossberga</td>
<td>Högsrum</td>
<td>Crest of plane esker, cultivated area</td>
<td>1000 – 2000 m</td>
<td>ca. 46</td>
<td>ca. 2600 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 84:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norra Möckleby</td>
<td>Norra Möckleby</td>
<td>Plane ridge surrounded by swamp areas, forest area</td>
<td>1000 – 2000 m</td>
<td>ca. 35</td>
<td>ca. 6200 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 1:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandby</td>
<td>Sandby</td>
<td>Low crest of plane sea bank, cultivated area, waterhole to the west</td>
<td>Less than 1000 m</td>
<td>ca. 3</td>
<td>ca. 40 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 45:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 Viberg et al. 2012 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svarteberga</td>
<td>Räplinge</td>
<td>Cultivated area, earlier swampy areas</td>
<td>ca. 1000 m</td>
<td>ca. 25</td>
<td>ca. 4500 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 111:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treby</td>
<td>Segerstad</td>
<td>Slightly sloping and overgrown alvar area</td>
<td>1000 – 2000 m</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>ca. 3000 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 22:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triberga</td>
<td>Hulterstad</td>
<td>Plane limestone platform, swamp area to the east, alvar area</td>
<td>ca. 1000 m</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>ca. 3000 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 20:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vannborga</td>
<td>Köping</td>
<td>Plane limestone platform, cultivated area</td>
<td>Less than 1000 m (very close)</td>
<td>ca. 17</td>
<td>ca. 900 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 92:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vedby</td>
<td>Högby</td>
<td>Low isthmus between drained swamp areas, cultivated area</td>
<td>1000 – 2000 m</td>
<td>ca. 6</td>
<td>ca. 2600 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 23:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 alltpaoland – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Metre above sea level (presently)

**Table 2: The possible Ölandic ringforts (alphabetical order), part I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible ringfort</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Surrounding terrain</th>
<th>Distance to the closest Iron Age settlement</th>
<th>M.A.S.L.*</th>
<th>Distance to sea</th>
<th>RAÄ number</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brostorp</td>
<td>Glömminge</td>
<td>Flat sandy ground, forest area</td>
<td>Less than 1000 m (very close)</td>
<td>ca. 40</td>
<td>ca. 3200 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 3:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Fallgren 2008 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gårdby &quot;Högkullbacken&quot;</td>
<td>Gårdby</td>
<td>Low moraine ridge, cultivated area</td>
<td>Less than 1000 m (very close)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>ca. 3800 m</td>
<td>RAÄ 16:1</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Fallgren 2006 alltpaoland.com – 2014-02-05 My calculations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>vegetation, forest area</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Wall height</th>
<th>Building materials</th>
<th>Building technique</th>
<th>Interior remains</th>
<th>Gates</th>
<th>Exterior remains</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sörby</td>
<td>Gärdslösa</td>
<td>Dense vegetation, forest area</td>
<td>1000 – 2000 m</td>
<td>Semicircular</td>
<td>2-3.5 m</td>
<td>Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics</td>
<td>1 Medieval gate tower, undated house remains</td>
<td>At least 1</td>
<td>Outer ringwall</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Fallgren 2008 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Åkersberga</td>
<td>Källa</td>
<td>Elevated area, pasture area</td>
<td>Probably less than 1000 m</td>
<td>Circed</td>
<td>ca. 2.2 m (reconstructed to 5 m)</td>
<td>Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside</td>
<td>ca. 20 radially joined houses (Eketorp I), ca. 53 radially joined houses (Eketorp II), portcullis, 1 well</td>
<td>1 (Eketorp I) 3 (Eketorp II) 1 (Eketorp III)</td>
<td>A probable medieval gate tower, outer ringwall, medieval smithies</td>
<td>Fallgren 2008 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Östra Vässby</td>
<td>Föra</td>
<td>A drained swamp area to the south</td>
<td>1000 – 2000 m</td>
<td>Circed</td>
<td>ca. 4-7 m</td>
<td>Limestone with elements of greystone and stones of other rock types</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics</td>
<td>3 Medieval gate tower, undated house remains, 1 well</td>
<td>Probably 9 3 in the Middle Ages</td>
<td>Outer ringwall, medieval chapel (S:t Knuts kapel)</td>
<td>Fallgren 2008 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hässleby</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67-68 m d</td>
<td>Circed</td>
<td>0.4-1.3 m</td>
<td>Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1 forge or metal production-place</td>
<td>At least 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fallgren 2008 My calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ismantorp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>124-127 m d</td>
<td>Circed</td>
<td>2.5-4 m</td>
<td>Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside</td>
<td>ca. 95 radially joined houses, 1 small smithy (1000-1300 AD)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Outworks with large raised granit boulders to the southeast and northeast</td>
<td>Fallgren 2008 My calculations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: The Ölandic ringforts (alphabetical order), part II**

- **Bårby**
  - Size: 140 m x 70 m
  - Shape: Semicircular
  - Wall height: 2-3.5 m
  - Building materials: Limestone with elements of greystone
  - Building technique: Drymasonry, filling of erratics
  - Interior remains: 1 Medieval gate tower, undated house remains
  - Gates: At least 1
  - Exterior remains: Outer ringwall

- **Eketorp I**
  - Size: 55-57 m d
  - Shape: Circled
  - Wall height: ca. 2.2 m (reconstructed to 5 m)
  - Building materials: Limestone with elements of greystone
  - Building technique: Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside
  - Interior remains: ca. 20 radially joined houses (Eketorp I), ca. 53 radially joined houses (Eketorp II), portcullis, 1 well
  - Gates: 1 (Eketorp I) 3 (Eketorp II) 1 (Eketorp III)
  - Exterior remains: A probable medieval gate tower, outer ringwall, medieval smithies

- **Eketorp II & Eketorp III**
  - Size: 75-80 m d
  - Shape: Circled
  - Wall height: ca. 4-7 m
  - Building materials: Limestone with elements of greystone and stones of other rock types
  - Building technique: Drymasonry, filling of erratics
  - Interior remains: 3 Medieval gate tower, undated house remains, 1 well
  - Gates: Probably 9 3 in the Middle Ages
  - Exterior remains: Outer ringwall, medieval chapel (S:t Knuts kapel)

- **Gråborg**
  - Size: 210 m x 162 m
  - Shape: Irregularly circled
  - Wall height: ca. 7 m
  - Building materials: Limestone with elements of greystone and stones of other rock types
  - Building technique: Drymasonry, filling of erratics
  - Interior remains: 3 Medieval gate tower, undated house remains, 1 well
  - Gates: Probably 9 3 in the Middle Ages
  - Exterior remains: Outer ringwall, medieval chapel (S:t Knuts kapel)

- **Hässleby**
  - Size: 67-68 m d
  - Shape: Circled
  - Wall height: 0.4-1.3 m
  - Building materials: Limestone with elements of greystone
  - Building technique: –
  - Interior remains: 1 forge or metal production-place
  - Gates: At least 1
  - Exterior remains: 1 well to the north, 1 cairn touching the once standing northern wall, 3 house foundations to the west

- **Ismantorp**
  - Size: 124-127 m d
  - Shape: Circled
  - Wall height: 2.5-4 m
  - Building materials: Limestone with elements of greystone
  - Building technique: Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside
  - Interior remains: ca. 95 radially joined houses, 1 small smithy (1000-1300 AD)
  - Gates: 9
  - Exterior remains: Outworks with large raised granit boulders to the southeast and northeast
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Wall Type</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Possibly Houses</th>
<th>Workshops</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lenstad</td>
<td>73 m x 55 m</td>
<td>Irregularly circled</td>
<td>0.2-1.5 m Greystone with elements of limestone</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>At least 2</td>
<td>Semicircular outer ringwall (possible bailey)</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05, Stenberger 1933, Wegraeus 1976, Fallgren 2008, Andrén 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Löt</td>
<td>155 m x 139 m</td>
<td>Oval</td>
<td>1.5-2.5 m Greystone with elements of limestone</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Radially joined houses</td>
<td>Probably 3</td>
<td>Outworks with large raised granit boulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mossberga</td>
<td>150 m x 115 m</td>
<td>Oval</td>
<td>1.2 m Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside</td>
<td>Radially joined houses</td>
<td>Probably 3</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norra Möckleby</td>
<td>85 m x 52 m</td>
<td>Oval</td>
<td>0.2-1 m Greystone with elements of limestone</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4 cairns</td>
<td>Possibly at least 1</td>
<td>1 well to the north, a few cairns to the southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandby</td>
<td>95 m x 64 m</td>
<td>Oval</td>
<td>1-3.5 m Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside</td>
<td>53-54 radially joined houses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outworks with large raised granit boulders to the west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svarteberga</td>
<td>Probably 100 m x 70 m</td>
<td>Probably oval</td>
<td>1 m at peak height Limestone and graystone</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Possibly 2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treby</td>
<td>44 m x 38 m, 65 m x 51 m, 66 m x 48 m</td>
<td>1 circled, 2 irregularly circled</td>
<td>1.2 m Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside</td>
<td>ca. 76 radially joined houses, 1 well in the southern ringfort</td>
<td>At least 1 (also gates between them)</td>
<td>1 well to the southeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triberga</td>
<td>60-62 m d</td>
<td>Circled</td>
<td>1.5-2 m Limestone with elements of greystone</td>
<td>Drymasonry, filling of erratics, stepped walls on the inside</td>
<td>Undated house remains, 1 well</td>
<td>Possibly 3, 1 in the Middle Ages</td>
<td>Outer ringwall, medieval workshops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4: The possible Ölandic ringforts (alphabetical order), part II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible ringfort</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Wall height</th>
<th>Building materials</th>
<th>Building technique</th>
<th>Interior remains</th>
<th>Gates</th>
<th>Exterior remains</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brostorp</td>
<td>ca. 50 m d</td>
<td>Irregularly circled</td>
<td>ca. 0,1-0,3 m h</td>
<td>Greystone and earth</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Högkullsbacken&quot;</td>
<td>40 m x 28 m – 32 x 18</td>
<td>Oval</td>
<td>ca. 1 m h</td>
<td>Limestone, greystone and earth</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Probably 1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: The Ölandic ringforts (alphabetical order), part III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ringfort</th>
<th>Finds</th>
<th>Find context and comments</th>
<th>Dating</th>
<th>Excavations</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bårby</td>
<td>1 Byzantine solidus (518-527 AD), 2 bronze fibulae (7th and 8th century AD), 1 mosaic pearl, 1 dagger blade of iron, 1 quadrilateral chisel of flint, 1 arrowhead of iron, 1 iron rowel (Early Middle Ages), 1 warded lock of bronze (Early Middle Ages), Fragments of pottery wares, pieces of charcoal and animal bones</td>
<td>Stirred earth within the construction. Cultural layers in the center of the construction, where pieces of charcoal animal bones were found. The rest of the finds are stray finds.</td>
<td>5th century AD</td>
<td>1930 (Stenberger)</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eketorp</td>
<td>More than 25 000 finds from all different kinds of contexts, where almost 20 000 of them originate from the Eketorp III period.</td>
<td>Totally excavated and reconstructed. For thorough descriptions and details see e.g. Stenberger 1933; Borg et al. 1976; Boessneck 1979; Näsman &amp; Wegraeus 1979; Borg 1998; Telldahl 2012.</td>
<td>300-400 AD (Eketorp I) 400-700 AD (Eketorp II) 1170-1250 AD (Eketorp III)</td>
<td>1925-1926 (Stenberger) 1931 (Stenberger) 1964-1974 (Borg, Näsman &amp; Wegraeus)</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Borg et al. 1976 Näsman &amp; Wegraeus 1979 Borg et al. 1998 Telldahl 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Finds</td>
<td>Culture/Period</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gråborg</td>
<td>Huge amount of finds within contexts of agriculture, smithery, weaponry, pomp, household and animal keeping (Migration Period, Vendel era, Viking Age, Middle Ages and Early Modern Period)</td>
<td>Stirred earth within the construction. Stray finds and finds from excavations. For thorough descriptions and details see Tegnér et al. 2008.</td>
<td>5th century AD</td>
<td>1919 (Billow) 1998-2002 (Hagberg &amp; Malm) Tegnér et al. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hässleby</td>
<td>1 waterstone, burnt and unburnt animal bones, fragments of pottery wares, fragments of resin, iron artefacts such as knife blades, pearls, huge amount of slag, burnt clay, hearths and postholes, 1 smithy with traces of 2 bases of iron producing ovens and 3 crucibles with traces of metal from bronze casting (carbon-14 datings of the hearth sand ovens gave 110 BC ±90 years, 105 BC ±90 years, BC ±90 years, 25 BC ±95 years, 180 AD ±100 years, and 220 AD ±100 years)</td>
<td>Stirred earth within the construction. Finds of the oldest certain iron production-place on Öland. It was located in the northern part of the construction, where most of the cultural layers were found. Otherwise very sparse with cultural layers. Most of the finds came from the northern part, but also from other parts of the construction. For thorough descriptions and details see e.g. Edgren et al. 1976; Gustafsson 2002.</td>
<td>Probably 1-200 AD or even earlier</td>
<td>1969-1971 (Hagberg) 1974 (Edgren) 1976-1977 (Edgren) FMIS – 2014-02-05 Edgren et al. 1976 Gustafsson 2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ismantorp</td>
<td>1 Arabic silver coin (Viking Age), 1 iron fibula (mid-4th century-late 5th century AD), 1 lancehead of iron (6th century AD), 1 arrowhead of iron (400-500 AD), pieces of burnt and unburnt animal bones (e.g. goat/sheep, horse, cattle), pieces of charcoal, pieces of iron slag, 1 fireplace and a posthole (carbon-14 datings of charcoal gave mainly 300-600 AD and 1000-1300 AD)</td>
<td>No occupation layers within the construction. Spaces within houses, open areas between houses and the central part of the construction have been excavated, i.e. various parts of the construction. The iron weapons were found in small deposition pits at the central part of the construction, as well as the fireplace and the posthole. A few of the finds are stray finds.</td>
<td>3rd century AD</td>
<td>Late 19th century (Hildebrand) 1904 (Arne) 1926-1926 (Stenberger) 1931 (Stenberger) 2000-2001 (Andrén) Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976 Sigvallius 1994 Andrén 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenstad</td>
<td>1 bronze ring with 9 torses (5th century AD)</td>
<td>Stirred earth within the construction. 1 stray find from within the construction.</td>
<td>5th century AD</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Löt</td>
<td>1 resin clod, 1 piece of bronze work, unburnt animal bones (sheep/goat, cattle, pig, horse, bird), unburnt human bones (adult), possibly 1 iron spur and 1 ferrule of bronze (Migration Period, however, only known from oral sources)</td>
<td>Stirred earth within the construction, except ca. 1/13 part of it in the southwest, which is precisely where the last excavations took place, and where the bones were found. The first was a little dig in the northeastern part of the construction where skeletal remains of 1 individual were found.</td>
<td>Iron Age, possibly Migration Period</td>
<td>1914 (Hofrén) 1989-1990 (Schulze)</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976 Schulze 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mossberga</td>
<td>1 Byzantine solidus (5th century AD), 1 bronze figurine of a sitting man (Migration Period), 1 needle of bronze (ca. 500 AD), 1 tweezers of bronze (5th century AD), 4 lanceheads of iron (late Roman Iron Age-early Migration Period), 3 arrowheads of iron (Migration Period), 1 iron knife, 2 relief brooches of bronze (5th century AD), 1 stone axe of graystone and 1 celt</td>
<td>16 stray finds from within the construction. The bronze figurine was found in the central part of the construction, and probably depicts a rider.</td>
<td>5th century AD</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norra Möckleby</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Iron Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>References</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandby</td>
<td>Deposit 1 (covered by a limestone spall): 1 silver gilded relief brooch, 1 crossbow fibula of bronze and 1 iron fragment (possibly the needle to the fibula). Deposit 2 (covered by a limestone spall, probably originally lain in a container of organic material): 1 silver gilded relief brooch, 3 silver rings, 3 bronze rings, 2 pearls of cypreaeidae, 1 pearl of ivory, 22 pearls of glass, 12 pearls of wired silver wire, 1 pearl of bronze, 1 fragment of a possible pearl of bronze, 6 pendants of silver, 1 pearl of glass threaded on a bronze ring and 6 fragments of pearls of different shape and colour. Deposit 3 (covered by a limestone spall, surrounded by some small limestones): 1 silver gilded relief brooch, 12 pearls of glass of different shape and colour, 3 pearls of wired bronze wire, 1 pearl of bone or horn. Deposit 4 (covered by a limestone spall, probably originally lain in a container of organic material): 1 silver gilded relief brooch, 2 gold rings, 2 bronze rings, 4 pearls of wired silver wire, 6 pendants of silver, 1 pearl of bone or horn and 14 pearls of glass. Deposit 5 (lay next to a limestone): 1 silver gilded relief brooch. Stray finds such as 1 bronze rivet, 1 bronze ring, 1 piece of bronze work, 1 crossbow fibula of bronze, 1 knotenring of bronze, 1 gold ring (spiral) (probably originally lain in a hoard), 1 half silver gilded fibula (probably originally lain in a hoard), pieces of jewelries, glass pearls, arrowheads, unburned bones of horse, cattle and sheep/goat. Skeletal remains from ca. 10 human individuals (all male) with clear traces of severe wounds.</td>
<td>5th century AD</td>
<td>2011-2013 (Victor)</td>
<td>FMIS – 2014-02-05 Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976 Viberg et al. 2012 <a href="http://www.svt.se">www.svt.se</a> – 2014-03-03 <a href="http://www.barometern.se">www.barometern.se</a> – 2014-03-03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svarteberga</td>
<td>1 bronze figurine of a standing woman Stray finds of several iron objects near the site (Middle Ages)</td>
<td>Iron Age</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976 Andrén 2014 Grey sources (ATA*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treby</td>
<td>1 piece of glass (originated from the northern region of the Black Sea) (4th century AD), lanceheads of iron, arrowheads of iron, iron keys, iron locks, waterstones, ferrules, spurs, horse-nails, pieces of bronze work, pieces of pottery, 1 bone comb (12th century AD) and 1 fragment of a runestone</td>
<td>5th century AD</td>
<td>1966 (Skarin-Frykman)</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976 Skarin-Frykman 1966</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triberga</td>
<td>1 piece of glass (originated from the northern region of the Black Sea) (4th century AD), lanceheads of iron, arrowheads of iron, iron keys, iron locks, waterstones, ferrules, spurs, horse-nails, pieces of bronze work, pieces of pottery, 1 bone comb (12th century AD) and 1 fragment of a runestone Finds from different parts of the construction. The runestone fragment is a stray find, which was found in the ruined northern stone wall.</td>
<td>4th century AD</td>
<td>2000-2002 (Linné-universiteten)</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976 Information sign at the site – 2014-03-13 Grey source (ATA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vannborga</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Iron Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vedby</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Iron Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Stenberger 1933 Wegraeus 1976</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet*
2.1 The possible past existence of a ringfort in Borgholm

Borgholm Castle (Sw. Borgholms slott) is located close to the west coast of Öland (ca. 700 m) (my calculation) (see fig. 1), and could well have been built on the site of a much older fort. The main reason for this possibility is in fact due to the castle’s rather peculiar name. We have previously established in the dissertation that the word “borg” originally in Swedish means “a platform resembling hilltop with steep sides”. However, it is not difficult to understand why the same word later has been given virtually the same meaning as the Swedish words “befästning”, (En. bastion), “fästning” (En. ”fortress”), and “skans” (En. “barbican”), since such structures in many ways have the same appearance as a platform with steep sides (e.g. high inner and outer wall faces), hence, constituting a form of artificial hilltop or plateau. It is therefore reasonable that Borgholm has the word “borg” in its name, since that is an accurate description of the old structure. However, the name becomes rather peculiar with the following word “holm”, which is an old Swedish word sometimes synonymous to the words “skans” and “befästning” (oral Prof. Ola Kylberg) (i.e. En. “barbican” or “bastion”). Nevertheless, sometimes the word “holm” refers to a particular islet of which often constitutes the actual location. The island of Öland would in this context be considered as a mainland, making that reason for the name improbable. In some cases the word “holm” has been added in names of castles and to certain place-names to emphasize its status (oral Doc. Anders Carlsson). Hence, “holm” would be associated to the castle in Borgholm. The name of the castle is thus composed of words with almost the same meaning, which is quite unusual. It would almost be as if, for example, a certain marshland had the name Madträsk, where the two composed words mad and träsk are strongly associated with wetlands (Agertz 2008:159).
One possibility could then be that Borgholm was partly named after the ringfort that was already located there on the site, where for example the word “borg” was taken from that old ringfort. The name of Borgholm would therefore refer to two different forts, the old one and the new one, instead of referring twofold to the medieval castle. If so, the name would be quite understandable. That there are no traces left from an old ringfort on the site is consistent with the fact that the construction of the present Borgholm during the 12th and 13th century most certainly destroyed all such remains (Stibéus 2007:9). All that may remain of that ancient structure could be in the name of the castle itself.

On the other hand, one could ask; why build a castle on the site if there already is a fort present there? Why not instead reuse it and improve its construction, which evidentially was the case with the ringforts at Bårby, Eketorp, Gråborg and Triberga during the Early Middle Age? Besides, since we previously have established that the two Swedish words “borg” and “berg” are clearly related, could it thus not be possible that the word “borg” instead refers to the hilltop itself (i.e. on top of the Ölandic western reach), on which Borgholm Castle is situated?

These are, however, unsubstantiated, theoretical possibilities. Whilst I find it more implausible, it is also possible that the old ringfort indeed was reused and even improved at an early stage, probably during the 11th century, and later due to royal demands the old structure had to be completely rebuilt. Traces of any prior improvements would then be long gone, due to the construction of the castle.

The form of the name, Borgholm, suggests that it does not refer to the hilltop itself, on which the structure is situated. By comparisons with other sites, that would be expected only if the word “borg” came at the end of the name. Compare for example Landborgen, Eneborg, Skogsborg and Strömsborg (Agertz 2008; markaryd.se – 2014-04-30). The location in question is strategically appropriate, since it provides the site an overviewing advantage over the Kalmar Strait, hence, effectively controlling that area. It would, therefore, seem peculiar if there never was an older structure on the site before. It is therefore more plausible that the word “borg” is a reference to an older structure on the site. This interpretation of a past existence of a structure on the site is also supported by, for example, the word of Mårten Stenberger (1933:255) in his dissertation, and Göran Hallberg (1985:23) in the book *Ortnamn på Öland*, where he deals with the origin of place-names on Öland.
3. Analysis

3.1 Geographical and topographical locations

The geographical and topographical location of the Ölandic ringforts is striking in that they are almost exclusively located in the inland (see fig. 1) and the lowland. The only exceptions are Bårby ringfort and Sandby ringfort, where Bårby is situated next to the steep slopes of the limestone rock of the Ölandic western reach approximately 44 metres a.s.l., hence, its semicircular shape, and Sandby is located only about 40 metres from the shoreline.

One must remember, however, that the ringforts would have been nearer the sea by the time of the Roman Iron Age (ca. 2000 years ago) because the land was about two metres lower, relative to new sea level (Viberg et al. 2012:5). Hence, the ringforts were located slightly closer to the sea in the Iron Age. Although this fact only marginally affects the ringforts in the inland, it made a much difference to Sandy ringfort, which presently is located approximately three metres a.s.l. The eastern outer perimeter wall would then have been situated considerably closer to its contemporary shoreline. I would argue that this extreme proximity to the sea strongly indicates the presence of a harbour next to the ringfort. This possibility has been mentioned in the article A room with a view (Viberg et al. 2012:16).

Such a harbour could also have provided the ringfort with physical protection from the often stormy sea. This would have been consistent, since there would otherwise be little reason to construct a ringfort in such close proximity to the sea. The possibility of a harbour next to the ringfort is indicated by the eastern gate, which would have provided easier accessibility.

Whilst one might notice that Vannborga ringfort is situated much closer to the sea than the other ringforts (ca. 900 m), that does not make it a coastal ringfort in the same class as Sandby ringfort, where the presence of the sea at the site is much more substantial (cf. cover picture). A coastal location should imply a fairly high sea presence in order to fall within the definition. For example, during my visit at the site of Vannborga ringfort, I noticed that it was impossible even to see the sea from the site. In contrast Borgholm is situated about 700 metres from the shoreline, the elevated location yet provides an impressive view over the sea. Mere visibility of the sea does not, however, indicate a coastal ringfort, proximity and presence of the sea being the much consideration.

It must also be noted that even though Mossberga ringfort is situated slightly higher up in the terrain (ca. 46 metres a.s.l.) than Bårby ringfort, Bårby is still classified as a so called
höjdborg (En. fort on height). Mossberga, on the other hand, is classified as a flatmarksborg (En. lowland fort), which basically is the same as the category of ringforts, since they usually are placed in the lowland. This appears to be due to Bårby’s characteristics, utilizing the steep slopes of its western perimeter as a natural demarcation, in the same way as many of the hillforts on the mainland. Nevertheless, Bårby ringfort is, despite its topographical location and semicircular shape, still often regarded as one of the “normal” ringforts on Öland (cf. Gustafsson 2002:17).

Due to the topography of the island, there seems to have been little choice but to construct the ringforts in the lowland. In most cases, however, these ringforts have been built on the highest possible terrain of that specific area, or on platforms which may have been artificially constructed (see Stenberger 1933). This strongly indicates that the precise location of the ringforts was very important.

Even though the placing had to be in the lowland, it would appear that it was intended to distinguish the ringforts to some degree from the rather flat surrounding terrain so that they formed a focal point in the landscape. From a defensive perspective, however, one could also argue that the higher the ground, the more defendable it becomes (see e.g. Näsman 1997:146). Whilst this is a valid principle of defence it does not seem to be of much importance (in the context of the Ölandic ringforts). The slightly elevated ground for the ringforts only marginally distinguishes itself from the rest of the terrain. If the purpose was primarily defensive, then would not the construction of the ringforts have required greater efforts in creating higher grounds for their placement? Placement of the ringforts could rather be due to other reasons, such as to avoid the risk of flooding from the nearby swamp areas. This is discussed further in section 3.3 Relation to environmental attributes.

The geographical placement of the ringforts raises several other questions. Öland is a long and narrow island, so there would be no difficulties placing the ringforts close to the sea, if intended. Even the island of Gotland has several ringforts situated along its coast (see fig. 3) (Cassel 1998:129 ff.). With the exception of Sandby ringfort, however, and the possible ringfort in Borgholm, all of the Ölandic ringforts are clearly situated fully inland, away from the coast. This inland placement could support a military interpretation if it was a measure for impeding outward assaults from the sea. By placing them far away from the sea they could have functioned as suitable places of refuge and rallying-points for the inhabitants. Hence, the ringforts would have protected the inhabitants from aggressors and served as places to mobilize and organize defence and counterattacks. The inland placement would also have
forced any aggressors to advance into the inland, with the risk of being cut-off by the Ölandic defenders. This could be a valid interpretation if the threat was mostly from raiders who were mainly active along the coastline. This does not, however, account for the coastal placement of Sandby ringfort. Unfortunately, in archaeological research, the costal location of Sandby ringfort has often been regarded as an exception among the Ölandic ringforts (see e.g. Näsman 1997:149; Viberg et al. 2012:16), or the fact has not even been mentioned at all. This is peculiar, since the location does not correspond well to the earlier interpretation regarding the placement of ringforts. For example, would not Sandby ringfort and those connected to it have been severely exposed? It would seem reasonable to assume that any aggressors would have had time to disembark and surround the ringfort, consequently cutting off the inhabitants’ route to safety.

This deviation from the general pattern should be discussed, especially when there is a possibility of a second ringfort very close to the sea. However, this reflection may not apply in the same way to the possible ringfort in Borgholm, because the site’s strategic location on the edge of the Ölandic western reach would naturally prevent assaults from the sea to the west. The location of Sandby ringfort, however, still remains anomalous. In order to understand this, it seems we have to assume that Sandby ringfort, and the possible ringfort in Borgholm, had a different function and purpose from the inland ringforts. As suggested above, there are strong indications that Sandby ringfort was placed next to a contemporary harbour, so it could have been built for this purpose, as a suitable landing site for non-military vessels. The same might also apply to the possible ringfort in Borgholm.
This interpretation of Borgholm could, however, be dismissed on the basis that only a few kilometers east of the site lies the Viking Age and Early Middle Age community of Köping, which during this time period (900-1200 AD) was an important harbour and marketplace, because of its ideal placement with its shallow and safe landing site (see Rudolfsson 2003:28). Even if there was a ringfort in Borgholm, it is reasonable to assume that this particular region had its primary harbour in Köping, and because of the characteristics of the place, it is most possible that the site had this function even during the Iron Age. Perhaps this site was connected to Borgholm, and not only during the Early Middle Age, but also in the Iron Age. If so, the site of Borgholm could still have presided over a harbour (see Rudolfsson 2003:28; Stibéus 2007:9).

In considering the inland placement of the ringforts, it is important to remember the geography of Öland, in that it is a long and narrow island. This may account for the explicit inland placement. If a ringfort was situated on the coast much of the surrounding space would be of water. This could be viewed as a loss of space in terms of fewer settlements and consequently fewer people connected to the ringfort. This could be viewed in terms of community and assets of labour. Furthermore, a coastal location could also be viewed as a loss of space for the ringforts to control. It is reasonable to assume that an inland placement would give the ringforts control over a much larger area, than would a coastal placement. On the same premises much of the surrounding space is “wasted” on the sea. This is clearly illustrated in fig. 4.

It might be argued that this is in contrast to the situation on Gotland, where there clearly are several ringforts situated along the coast. There is, however, a huge difference in the shapes of the two islands. Gotland is for example a much wider island than Öland (cf. fig. 1 with fig. 3). The narrow shape of Öland may have made it possible to control a sufficient enough area of the island, which may have ranged from coast to coast. This would, therefore,
not have been the case on Gotland, where the wide shape of the island would have prevented a solely inland placement from having control of sufficient areas of land. This would consequently have created “empty spaces” on the island. Perhaps this deemed it necessary to construct forts either at or close the coasts of Gotland in order to fill out these “empty spaces”.

In terms of the possibility of invading forces, the inland placement would have forced the aggressors to take the ringforts first in order to gain control of the main domains of the island. Hence, regardless of the magnitude of assaults, whether they primarily constituted of minor incursions or regular wars of conquest, the inland placement would have been an effective counter measure.

Whilst the unusual location of Sandby ringfort still remains, it could be considered to fit quite well into this more “peaceful” interpretation of the ringforts. In that context Sandby is less exposed, than in a “warlike” context. Also the loss of surrounding space could be explained by the fact that Sandby ringfort perhaps had another function role, which previously in archaeological research has been disregarded.

3.2 Relation to surrounding settlements

This specific aspect has been dealt with quite thoroughly before in archaeological research (Fallgren 2008), as has the ordinary agrarian settlement from 200-700 AD on Öland (Fallgren 1993, 1998, 2006). The source material regarding these particular remains from within that certain time period constitutes of more than 1300 known or preserved house foundations outside the ringforts, which possibly correspond to approximately 1100 farms. This is the highest concentration of Iron Age house foundations in the whole of Scandinavia (Fallgren 2006:25 ff.). These are displayed in fig. 5, where they also are put in relation to the Ölandic ringforts.

It is reasonable to assume that the original number of Iron Age house foundations undoubtedly was substantially higher. This is strongly indicated by the fact that the best agricultural districts, such as Mörbylångadalen and Gärdslösa display a much lower concentration of house foundations than expected, which most probably is due to the many centuries of cultivation (Fallgren 2006:25,143). This is a theme which otherwise seems quite consistent throughout Öland, where much of the available land has been cultivated. There were than probably more Iron Age house foundations all over Öland, than the source material currently displays. This would imply an even larger Ölandic population during this time period. As shown in tables 1 and 2, the majority of the ringforts are situated approximately
1 km from the closest Iron Age settlement. Between 1 and 2 km is also common, while Gräborg is the only exception being situated between 2 and 3 km from the closest Iron Age settlement. Only a few of these ringforts are situated very close to the settlement, which is illustrated in fig. 5. The pattern is yet clear here: the ring-forts are distinctly distanced from the closest Iron Age settlements, usually between approximately 1 and 2 km, on the periphery of any such group.

In connection to Fallgren’s (2008) analysis of the ringfort-settlement relation, he discovered that Brostorp, Gårdbjorg, Hässleby ringfort and Vannborga ring-fort had a completely different kind of relation to their surrounding settlements, than the other Ölandic ringforts. As fig. 5 illustrates they are situated amidst or very close to the earliest house foundations (200-700 AD), as the prehistorical and historical cultivated land on Öland. This is claimed by Fallgren to strongly indicate an older dating and different context for these ringforts, with the exception, of Gårdbjorg, which most probably originates from the Middle Ages, due to its characteristics (2008:119 ff.).

Despite the uncertainty of the possible ringforts Sörby, Åkersberga and Östra Vässby, which was discussed in chapter one, the map clearly illustrates that

**Fig. 5: Distribution map of the definite and possible ringforts. The black dots represent the house foundations. The black circles are the definite ringforts, and the grey circles are the possible Ölandic ringforts in relation to all known house.**
their estimated sites all have the same relation to their surrounding settlements as the definite ringforts. Whilst this is interesting, there could be other reasons for the lack of settlement and cultivation close to those specific sites.

This peripheral location from the different settlements has, in archaeological research, been seen as evidence that the ringforts were constructed on a collective initiative by neighbouring settlements (see e.g. Näsman 1997; Fallgren 2008; Viberg et al. 2012; Andrén 2014). There is a clear proportional relation between the size of the ringforts and the size and number of surrounding farms, as well as the size of the outland in which the ringforts are situated. The larger the ringfort, the more numerous and larger are the farms surrounding it are, the greater the area of the outland (see Fallgren 2008). This is also supported by the fact that the gateways of the ringforts almost always point towards the closest settlement (see Fallgren; Andrén 2014).

This pattern is interesting, since it supports the construction of ringforts as joint ventures or cooperative enterprises between several different settlements. The central location of the ringforts from the surrounding settlements in these outlands does not connect to or point towards a single settlement, but to all of them, as that specific location also functions as a bridge or mutual agglutinative element in the landscape between the different settlements. It is also reasonable that the size of the ringforts reflects the size and number of the connected farms, since that also would reflect the number of involved people in the construction of the ringforts. The more people that are mutually involved, the greater the need may have been for constructing a larger ringfort and the lesser the effort per capita would have been in such a project. This could also reflect the complexity of the social structure and organization on Öland at the time.

This peripheral location of the ringfort with connected settlements, or its central location between neighbouring settlements, does not necessarily imply purposes of fortification and defence. Yet this has been argued or suggested by several archaeologists through the many years of research of the Ölandic ringforts (see e.g. Stenberger 1933, Näsman 1997; Fallgren 2008; Viberg et al. 2012). This is in conformity with the research of the hillforts on the Swedish mainland, as described in chapter one.

As suggested by Andrén (2014), the choice of placement of the ringforts could for example have been made on the premise that they were placed on a fairly equal distance from the different settlements on neutral territory. This would be in contrast to the explanation that the ringforts were placed equally remote for all of the involved. Whilst this possible, one should
not dismiss other equally plausible possibilities. The reasons for an inland placement do not automatically imply contexts of conflict and violence. Given that the ringforts were probably collective enterprises, it would be logical to place them on neutral territory. Such placement have neither favoured nor intruded on any particular settlement. Instead the inhabitants from the adjacent settlements could have constructed, maintained and used these sites on equal terms.

3.3 Relation to environmental attributes

One environmental attribute that is present in the vicinity of almost all the Ölandic ringforts are bogs, fens, marshes and swamps. Half of the definite and possible ringforts have or have had one or a few of these wetlands nearby. This high relational occurrence indicates a connection between the ringforts and these wetlands, which indeed could support a military interpretation of them. As mentioned in chapter one, the relation between ringforts and swamp areas was explained as constituting natural defences, which would have provided the ringforts more protection from invading enemies, since wetlands are characteristically very difficult to pass through. Such natural defences would have impeded any aggressors’ approach towards the ringfort. The use of wetlands in this way could for that reason be seen as appropriate, given the lack of other natural defences.

This could be a valid explanation of the ringfort-wetland relation, where the wetlands may have functioned as functional predecessor to the later medieval moats. One must remember, however, that with wetlands there is the more than pragmatic issue that they are largely unpassable. It is reasonable to presume that wetlands as a phenomenon have from the Stone Age to the Iron Age been regarded as places with special (e.g. magical or religious) significance. There are many legends and folktales where wetlands are portrayed with certain religious, ritual and mythological meanings. There is much archaeological evidence in the source material strongly indicating that many wetlands during several hundred years were subject to different ritual presences. Such ritual practices were, for example, votive sacrifices of humans, animals and weaponry (see Gustafsson 2007:2,7). The war-booty sacrifices are perfect examples of a form of votive sacrifice, which in the Iron Age not only occurred on the Swedish mainland and in Denmark, but also in Skedemosse on central Öland. As mentioned in chapter one, this was a site that functioned as a place of ritual from Pre-Roman Iron Age into the Viking Age, and was most certainly of cultural and religious significance. Whilst the wetlands close to ringforts were not necessarily involved in actual ritual practices, they could
have had symbolic meanings and so still been of importance to ringforts. Since we have shown that wetlands have had such impacts on people in prehistory, this is least a possibility.

One important aspect of the ringfort-wetland relation, which is not discussed much in the archaeological literature, is that it could support the interpretation of the ringforts being placed on neutral territory. Since wetlands, due to their characteristics, are not suitable for agricultural purposes, it is reasonable that they would lie in the outlands of any settlements. These outlands could very well have constituted neutral territories, since no cultivation or settlement was intended in those areas, and there would be no claim of ownership there. The reason for the later and modern time cultivation in those areas could be due to the draining of these wetlands.

Another important aspect to mention about the wetlands is that they could have provided sources of water for the ringforts. Some of the ringforts are even located close to waterholes, which presumably functioned as their main water supply. This would, however, imply severe problems for Ölandic defenders in enduring possible sieges, since they could easily be cut-off from their water supply.

3.4 Appearance and attributes

Even though the Ölandic ringforts vary in shape, their characteristic form is still circled or irregularly circled. About one-third display an oval shape. One obvious exception in both shape and appearance is Bårby ringfort, which consists of a semicircular wall to the east of the Ölandic western reach, where its western perimeter is naturally demarcated by the steep slopes of the limestone rock of that reach.

Another exception in terms of appearance is Treby ringfort. This consists of three quite small ringforts joined together in a southwest-northeast orientation. For that reason, Treby ringfort(s) has always been considered as one of the most extraordinary ringforts on Öland (see e.g. Stenberger 1993:219; Wegraeus 1976:36). However, despite this seemingly unique archaeological position, Treby has not been subject to much of the discussion in the research of the Ölandic ringforts, as has it not been subject to many archaeological investigations. Even though Treby consists of three stone circles, for the sake of simplicity it will be referred to in the singular.

Lacking natural barriers for demarcation, the ringforts appear to have been totally enclosed with stone walls. Although the reasons for this may seem to have been primarily defensive, the mere fact that it is enclosed by stone walls does not automatically make it a military
facility. As mentioned in chapter one, different kinds of enclosures have, through the course of history, been shown to have a variety of functions.

Regarding the choice of shape it is difficult to establish a definite pattern. Perhaps this variation depended on the preferences of the people who built and used it. For example, when Bårby ringfort was constructed, the people connected to it may have wanted the steep slopes of the limestone rock as a natural demarcation for the ringfort. This would at the same time have given them an overviewing advantage over the surroundings. It must also be said that it would have been ideal as a fortification.

In my visual investigation of Bårby ringfort I noticed that it even was possible to look out to the sea from the ringfort and with an impressive view too. This does not have to class Bårby a coastal ringfort, though, because the distance to the sea could be considered too great (ca. 2.8 km).

Such marginal access to the sea has, however, not been mentioned earlier in the archaeological literature of Bårby ringfort. That element could have been of at least some significance for perhaps the choice of placement and function. Remember also that the shoreline was slightly closer during the Roman Iron Age than presently, meaning that the sea would have been even more easily visible. This factor should at least be mentioned in archaeological research, since it is otherwise strongly focused on the placement of the ringforts.

The size of ringforts also shows strong variations. The smallest, with a size of 44 m x 38 m, is found in one of the stone circles of Treby, while Gråborg, with a size of 210 m x 162 m, is the largest. They can, however, be divided into three alternatively four different groups regarding size. To the smallest group, with a diameter below 60 m, can be ascribed the ringforts of Eketorp I, Vannborga and the smallest of the stone circles of Treby. The next group, with a diameter between 60 m and 100 m, can be ascribed the ringforts of Eketorp II, Hässleby, Lenstad, Norra Möckleby, Sandby, Svarteberga and Triberga. To this group the two remaining stone circles of Treby also belong. To the third group the really large ringforts are ascribed, which are, Ismantorp, Löt, Mossberga and Vedby. To this group Gråborg ringfort obviously also belongs. However, due to its immense size, in relation to the other large ringforts, Gråborg could just as well be placed in a fourth group of exceedingly large ringforts (Fallgren 2008). It shall be mentioned that these different groups regarding size only apply to the definite ringforts.

As mentioned in section 3.2 Relation to surrounding settlements, the different sizes of the
ringforts correlate to the number and sizes of the surrounding farms. This is logical if the basis is that the design of ringforts is a result of collective enterprises. Hence, the different sizes of ringforts are contextual in the regard that they reflect the certain need and preferences for each community. However, the exceptional size of Gråborg in relation to other ringforts and its central location on the southern haft of Öland does imply a form of powerful regional centre on the island.

The choice of building-material could reflect the amount of resource and availability of that particular material. Since Öland consists mostly of a limestone rock, limestone should not have been too difficult to come by. However, it is possible that greystone dominated the resource material in certain areas of the island. In the northern part of Öland, for example, the geology is not dominated by limestone (Gustafsson 2002:2). By looking at the walls of Vedby ringfort on northern Öland, which consist mainly of greystone, a pattern is thereby discovered. It is of course possible that the choice of building-material was rooted in some form of symbolic meaning, but that is difficult to determine. In relation to other elements it is also difficult to establish a clear pattern here. The clear deviation of Brostorp, where greystone and earth has been used in its walls could, however, further support the interpretation of it being of a different kind of structure with another context than the ringforts. This and its, in comparison to other ringforts, differentiated characteristics displayed as a conical platform of clay further implies a different context.

The original wall height of ringforts is quite difficult to estimate accurately. However, debris of varying degrees is present at all ringforts, which implies an originally higher wall level. Depending on the certain state of preservation the wall height of the different ringforts vary considerably. In some cases some of the walls have disappeared or are almost levelled to the ground, while in other cases the height of the walls are either about a metre or several metres high. However, the reasons for this vary. For example, in some cases extensive cultivation and the “passage of time” has had a severe impact on ringforts. In other cases some of them have been spared from cultivation, while others even have been reused during the course of time, thus, improved and reconstructed, meaning that they have not been subject to the same degree of deteriorating as other ringforts.

It should, however, be safe to say that the walls of ringforts were probably several metres high in their original state. In an otherwise flat landscape, ringforts perhaps provided a characteristic feature in the landscape. Since there are no other older or contemporary structures of this magnitude present on Öland, it should be reasonable to assume that these
ringforts constituted the most notable and remarkable structures of their time. Consequently, the stone walls were quite high, presumably several metres. In addition, the walls are the first thing you notice from the outside. A substantial effort would have been made in the design and construction of the walls if a prominent appearance was desired. The reconstruction of Eketorp ringfort, with its five metre high walls, could therefore be an accurate reflection of the original state of the other ringforts.

Its crenelated parapet, however, is an interpretation influenced by other forts in more southerly regions of Europe, which was made in connection to the reconstruction project, but lacks yet archaeological evidence. The parapets of the Ölandic ringforts could, therefore, have had a completely different design. As a defence measure, however, a crenelated parapet could be considered quite reasonable, since it does provide the defenders suitable cover and adequate space for bowmen. The substantial height of the walls could also be viewed in terms of defence, since walls, and especially high walls, impedes enemies from storming and conquering such structures. It is a basic principle of defence to make any attack on a fortification as costly as possible, in terms of casualties, resources and time. However, one of the weakest points with these structures, in terms of defence, is always its gateways. On Öland the pattern of three stands out in the material. Because whenever through archaeological investigations it has been possible to discern the gates in the stone walls, the figure of three appears to be the usual pattern. It could therefore be claimed that it is more probable that the Ölandic ringforts primarily had three gates, or that three gates was a common attribute on Öland, despite that several ringforts only display traces of having one or two gates.

The exception here of course is the ringfort of Ismantorp with its incredible nine gates. Nevertheless, three of them have been discerned as main gates (see Andrén 2014); hence, the figure of three was yet incorporated in its design. Recent investigations have revealed that Gråborg ringfort originally seemed to also have had nine gates, instead of only the three it today displays, which also have been discerned as main gates (see Tegnér 2008; Andrén 2014). This large number of gateways, especially regarding Gråborg and Ismantorp, could be considered problematic in terms of ringforts as fortifications. The larger the number of gateways a military installation has, the weaker it becomes. The abundance of gateways implies an inviting and welcoming attribute or policy, rather than an excluding and defensive standpoint.

It could be emphasized, however, that many of the nine gates may have been added over
time when its function changed, why the original number may have been considerably less. Whilst there may be theoretically possible, with the originally one gate in Eketorp in the 4th century later changed into three gates in the 5th century as an example, one could find this improbable with Ismantorp. With Gråborg it is proven that the gates of the ringfort were reduced in the Middle Ages, when it was reused, which also was the case with the gates of the ringforts of Eketorp and Triberga when they were reused. It is therefore questionable if a possible adding of gates occurred in the Middle Ages, since the pattern with the reused ringforts was the reverse. And even if this were to have occurred about the same time as the adding of gates in Eketorp, this fact would still have undermined the military interpretations. Since this period in archaeological research, the Migration Period, has often been viewed and referred to in contexts of conflict, violence and turmoil, it has legitimatized the military interpretations of the Ölandic ringforts. Adding gates in such a strongly presumed context, on the basis that ringforts were defensive structures, could be seen as irrational.

Apart from the obvious purpose of giving the fortification accessibility, one aspect of the gateways in the context of warfare, is that they enable the defenders easier measures of counterattacking enemies, for example, during sieges. Whilst only one gate would considerably reduce the number of weak points to the fortification, it would at the same time increasingly impede the ability for the defenders to initiate counterattacks. With only one gate any aggressors would always know from where the defenders’ possible counterattacks would come. Hence, all attention could be focused on monitoring and controlling that gate from the outside.

An additional gate would instead mean that an enemy laying siege would be forced to divide their troops and resources in order to avert any sudden counterattacks, which in the same process would weaken and expose them. Having three gates, however, could be considered as a grey zone. On the one hand, this attribute provides the defenders even more flexibility and options for counterattacks to an even more exposed enemy. The outworks present at a few of the ringforts could suggest that counterattacks were well-practiced by the defenders, since these could have been used to impede any aggressors from cutting off their route of retreat back to the fort after any counterattacks. On the other hand, it considerably weakens the fortification itself for initiated assaults. Two gates could, thus, be considered quite well-balanced in such circumstances.

All this, however, is strongly dependent on context: for example the possible threats, how wide scale warfare and minor incursions were fought, and what jurisdictional powers the elite
We know, however, that some of the ringforts were distinctly reused in the Middle Ages. This is clearly displayed in table 3 and table 4 with radical changes in the construction and incorporation of attributes with medieval contexts. These ringforts, which have been mentioned above are Bårby, Eketorp, Gråborg, Triberga, and probably even Vedby as well. Whilst even Ismantorp show traces of activity in the late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages, it does, however, not display traces of being reused in the same extent as the other ringforts with, for example, radical changes in the construction. These changes, which they were subject to in the Early Middle Ages, display a very different character than in the Iron Age. Consequently, in this medieval context the military characteristics are much more conspicuous in the source material. This is displayed by changes such as the closure of gateways and adding of outer ringwalls, gate towers, moats, bailey, workshops and smithies between the fort and the outer ringwall. All these radical changes reflect an explicit military notion, which also reflects a completely different social context on Öland, than in the Iron Age. To name but one example, the adding of an outer ringwall expresses a clear signal of the whole structure as a regular fortification, since it displays the characteristics of first line of defence against any attacking force. Once that line began to break, the defenders retreated to the fort, and thus, the secondary line of defence. There is otherwise no purpose with such a construction, since any aggressors approaching the ringfort could use the outer ringwalls as suitable cover and bases for initiating further assaults.

These reused ringforts have each the appearance of a military garrison, which is the primary interpretation of Eketorp III, and probably a valid one in this case. The question yet arises: why were these particular ringforts reused? By looking at their locations in fig. 1, we can see that Bårby, Eketorp, Gråborg and Triberga are evenly situated in the southern part of Öland. Each ringfort probably represented key positions in the landscape. Whilst Vedby ringfort up in the north was most probably also reused and that Borgholm Castle on central Öland was contemporary with the late stages of these reused ringforts, this clear southern concentration indicates the importance of maintaining military control on this part of the island. This would then imply that possible hostile threats primarily were expected to have come from the south.

One of the most interesting attributes of the Ölandic ringforts could perhaps be the placement of radially joined houses inside of them. Eleven of the ringforts show traces of house foundations, where this has either been confirmed through excavations on the sites, or
these remains have been observed through prior visual investigations. Six of them have been shown to have house foundations radially joined together, but it is possible that the other ringforts with house foundations also had them organized in this way. Whilst there are hillforts on the Swedish mainland that also display traces of houses, this attribute is not as prominent or common as on Öland. In addition, these houses were not placed according to the explicit model of being radially joined together as on Öland. This attribute on Öland could therefore be considered unique.

The houses uniform size and their relative placement inside the ringforts indicate a form of equality between them. This is in contrast to the organization of contemporary farms, where their different sizes and number of houses indicates a form of hierarchy and social differences between them (Fallgren 2008). This equality has also been suggested by Andrén (2014), who emphasizes that a form of military order can be inferred (from this attribute).

There is, however, one ringfort, that does not have any house foundations, but still displays the same relation to its surrounding settlements as the other ringfort with house foundations: Norra Möckleby ringfort. Whilst it could be possible to argue that Svarteberga ringfort also does not display any traces of house foundations, it is equally possible that it once did before its present deteriorated state. Norra Möckleby ringfort, however, does not, despite that it has been spared from cultivation. Another divergent attribute about this ringfort is the number of cairns within and outside it, some of which appear to be graves. Whilst it is difficult to confirm if they belong to the same context as the ringfort, the lack of any house remains in combination with the presence of cairns seems to be a significant feature.

3.5 The finds

Even though about half of the Ölandic ringforts have been excavated to various degrees, where Eketorp clearly distinguishes itself by having been totally excavated, theoretically many more finds could be discovered. This would further aid the discussion and interpretation of the ringforts. Whilst this would seem to be the case with the ringforts, the majority of them have been subject to cultivation during the latest centuries, so the earth inside is to some extent disturbed. Only the definitive ringforts of Eketorp, Ismantorp, Norra Möckleby, Treby and Triberga have been spared from this. Hence, much of the context within the other ringforts is to be considered destroyed or partly destroyed. Despite this there are a few patterns that emerge from the finds.

The relatively small amount of finds together with the clear lack of occupation layers
indicate that the ringforts were not used as permanent living quarters, with Eketorp II as the obvious exception, since its huge amount of finds, and clear traces of occupation layers, reflects the opposite. Otherwise this implies that a ringfort was primarily not meant for permanent habitation, but rather as a place of temporary use, including temporary occupation. Temporary places of assembly or refuge could, in this context, be reasonable interpretations.

The nature of the finds seems to reflect some form of social elite with Continental connections. Several finds are quite exclusive, such as rings of bronze, silver and gold, bronze fibulae, gilded relief brooches, Roman solidi, pearls and glassware. All glassware, for example, in the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period originated primarily from the Roman Empire, since at that time there was no such production present in Scandinavia. This implies that Ölanders were involved in trading down in the continent, and presumably at certain trading centres at the limits, the boundaries of the Roman Empire. Possessions of such exclusive items does also imply that the society on Öland at this time had a production surplus, which could be converted into these luxury articles. Since the most recognized interpretation of the prevailing economy on Öland during the Iron Age speaks of it as primarily based on keeping livestock, rather than arable farming, it is reasonable to assume that Öland’s production surplus was expressed in goods involving that economy, such as hide, leather, hollowing knives, needles and awls. Such goods could, thus, have been used to trade with the Roman Empire, since the maintenance of their vast armies would have demanded such artifacts for tents and soldiers’ personal equipment (see e.g. Aldestam 2000:36).

The gilded relief brooches indicate the presence of women belonging to a form of social elite, that being the usual interpretation of these artefacts (Andrén 2014:80). The Roman solidi indicate also a form of elite, though here it is more likely a question of warriors, who participated in battles down the continent and brought these gold coins back with them gold coins. The purpose of Roman solidi was to distribute them among the soldiers as payment for them fighting for the Roman Empire. It is believed that such demands for soldiers may have been the main purpose of the initiation of coinage (see Graeber 2011:228 ff.). However, sometimes the purpose of solidi was also to function as payment for enemies of the Empire to dissuade them from plundering their territory. Many Germanic tribes were often enlisted in the armed forces of Rome for certain periods in the late Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, in which the survivors received solidi after their contracts had expired. Öland displays a higher amount of solidi than any other part of Scandinavia. More than 300 Roman gold coins have been found on the island, where the majority are coined during the 5th century. The
discoveries of gold artifacts in general from Roman Iron Age and Migration Period on Öland are plenty. This indicates a prosperous society, or at least a prosperous elite. Many of the solidi brought to Öland probably were used not as currency but as raw material for manufacturing gold items (Aldestam 2000:24 f.).

The extremely high concentration of solidi strongly implies that Ölanders were active in battles involving the Roman Empire, fighting either for or against it. Furthermore that implies many Ölanders survived these ventures and were successful in bringing their wealth back home. All this would seem to indicate that the elite, whose presence we can see traces of in ringforts, was most probably of a warrior class. The finds of weapons dated to the Iron Age in ringforts would in this case be reasonable, since warrior elites most certainly would have had a distinct connection and association to military equipment, which necessarily was not implicated in the defence of ringforts.

Remains of burnt and unburnt animal bones are present at several ringforts, which would seem to be food waste. The possibility of meals taking place at them could therefore be argued. However, it is difficult to determine when and in what contexts this may have occurred.

The most interesting and striking finds of them all, however, is probably the recent excavation of ten or so bodies in Sandby ringfort, which all display traces of severe wounds inflicted through violence. These indicate that the ringfort at some point in the late 5th century was attacked, and that everyone inside was brutally slain and left where they had died. Interesting questions regarding this would then be: who are these individuals, who were responsible, and what were their motives? Whilst it would seem self-evident that these discoveries reflect the military role that Sandby and presumably other ringforts played at this time, there could, nevertheless, be other possible explanations.

Recent excavations and investigations of Sandby ringfort have concluded that the ringfort was abandoned at some point in the late 5th century, possibly around 460-490 AD (see Viberg et al. 2012). These possible dates, however, correspond to the fall of the Roman Empire around 480 AD (Näsman 1978:342 f.), which naturally coincides with the end of the solidi imports on Öland, where the last ones were coined in 476 AD (Frank 1998:7). Clearly the collapse of Rome meant that no more solidi could be coined. Ölanders could then no longer participate in any more battles involving the Roman Empire and, thus, no more solidi could be acquired and brought home.

Since much of the archaeological literature implies that it was mainly men who traveled to
the Roman Empire and fought in such battles (see e.g. Andrén 2011), the sex of the bodies at Sandby ringfort is of interest here. So far in the archaeological investigations of the ringfort, whenever it has been possible to discern the sex from the bodies, the result has always been male. Since we have these correlations in time, could it, thus, not be possible that these individuals were buried in the ringfort having been slain in a battle somewhere else? Similar sites in, for example, England have, after all, displayed traces resembling the ones in Sandby, where they have the appearance of massacre sites, but have through more thorough investigations later been interpreted as possible cemeteries (see Harding 2012:179 ff.). Since the abandonment of Sandby ringfort correlates with the fall of the Roman Empire, as well as the end of the solidi imports on Öland, could it not be possible that these dead individuals are related to the contemporary dramatic changes occurring down the continent? The conclusion of the ringfort was perhaps symbolized through the burials of some of the fallen individuals who participated in the last battles involving Rome, or in any other battles elsewhere. The point is that they could have been slain at a different location and transported to Sandby ringfort in order to be buried there.

Whilst it would seem as a huge enterprise to transport bodies at a vast distance as, for example, from the Roman Empire, the question does not only depend on the feasibility of such an enterprise, but also the nature of the religious beliefs held by the Ölanders. What did these people believe about death, their deities and afterlife? If the religious beliefs and traditions of a people are significant enough, they are prepared to go to great length in order to maintain them.

Lastly, the interesting discovery of a grave containing skeleton remains in Löt ringfort, as other finds of unburnt human bones from the site, could be explained by the simple fact that the site might have been sporadically used in the Middle Ages, when the ringfort otherwise was probably abandoned long ago, to house diseased people and shield them from the outside. When people eventually died, they could have been buried at the site. Since the bones have not been dated and that Ismantorp ringfort display dates of being sporadically used in the Middle Age, this suggestion could be possible.

3.6 Dates of construction, dates of use and dates of abandonment

There appears to be some form of unity or consensus between the different archaeologists, regarding the dates of the different stages of the history of the Ölandic ringforts. According to these researchers, all of the ringforts originate from the Iron Age and were primarily used
during that period (see e.g. Stenberger 1933; Edgren et al. 1976; Wegraeus 1976; Näsman 1997; Fallgren 2008; Viberg et al. 2012; Andrén 2014).

The Ölandic ringforts have primarily been dated through the finds discovered within them, which are mostly no earlier than Migration Period, 4th and 5th century AD. These finds have been discovered through excavations or by accident as stray finds. This is clearly displayed in tables 5 and 6 of the catalogue. Datable finds and clear relation to the house foundations from 200-700 AD has strongly supported this interpretation. Whilst more recent radiocarbon datings and a few datable finds have yielded dates as early as late Roman Iron Age (3rd century), it appears that ringforts belong to a Migration Period context appears clear. The general discovery of very few or no finds, as well as radiocarbon datings, rarely older than Migration Period in ringforts, could therefore imply that they primarily were constructed around this period.

Supporting this interpretation with regard to the Migration Period as a period presumed to be characterized by contexts of conflict and violence, corresponding to the military interpretations of ringforts should however, not be considered as equally valid. Whilst the construction of ringforts does not necessary have to indicate temporary periods of conflict, violence and turmoil, this characterization of the Migration Period could be exaggerated.

Despite the ringforts’ clear correlation with the Migration Period, most of them seem yet to have been in use well into the Vendel era (550-800 AD). The dates of use for the majority of the ringforts appear to extend to around 600-700 AD. This implies a period of continuing usage roughly 50-150 years after the end of the Migration Period in the mid-6th century. This is implied by the clear lack of datable finds and, thus, activity after the 7th century. The ringforts were, therefore, probably abandoned around this period. The same applies to the ringforts that, after centuries of neglect, were reused in the late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages.

One of the exceptions in terms of dates of construction and dates of use, however, is Hässleby ringfort, where radiocarbon datings from the site and the relations to the surrounding house foundations imply that the structure was built and used in the Pre Roman Iron Age and Early Roman Iron Age (ca. 500 BC – 200 AD). These dates apply most probably also to Vannborga ringfort, since it also displays the same relation to its surrounding house foundations as Hässleby ringfort. It is possible that, at the time that the late Roman Iron Age house foundations became established on Öland, both types of structure had become obsolete. Their early dates imply most probably a completely different kind of context, than
later ringforts, which must have meant that they had other functions and purposes. In the case of Hässleby ringfort, metal production would seem to have been one function, because of the discoveries of a smithy. Whether it belonged to a single farm or several contemporary surrounding farms is, however, difficult to determine.

Another exception, which has been mentioned before, is Gårdby borg. At this point there seems to be no doubt that this structure is and should be confined to a medieval context, since it displays a completely different character in both appearance, attributes and relation to its surrounding settlements, than any other ringfort.

Since there seems to be no visual traces of house foundations in Norra Möckleby ringfort in combination with the presence of cairns inside and outside of it, it is possible that even that structure is of a different context, presumably earlier than Migration Period. However, due to the absence of any known finds from the site, interpretations become much difficult. Whilst the absence of any datable finds also concerns Vedby ringfort and Löt ringfort, their traces of house remains and relation to surrounding settlements yet suggest that they belong to the same context as the other ringforts from around 200-400 AD.

4. Discussion

4.1 Existing interpretations and new possibilities

If Ölandic ringforts are to be viewed and interpreted in terms of defence, conflict and violence, we must carefully consider the archaeological evidence known from these sites and ask ourselves: what do we see?

It could be easy to view ringforts as regular fortifications, since they indeed share several attributes required and appropriate for structures with defensive functions. For example high walls, sometimes nearby outworks, distance from the coast, often close to wetlands, etc. It is also understandably that they have been viewed as such, since much of the research history of ringforts, and hillforts for that matter, have been pervaded by the current political and ideological climates of their time. Such climates have been influenced by desires of a strong national unity and hardened by international conflicts and tensions.

This does not, however, have to imply that we still need to refer to these ancient monuments in terms of defence, conflict and violence. We could instead more actively analyze these associations and gradate the discussion. Nevertheless, the tendency regarding Ölandic ringforts is still otherwise, where for example finds apparently proving the
occurrence of severe violence and even massacre at the site of one ringfort contributes to this. The issues, therefore, arise when archaeologists use evidence as such from particular ringforts, which supposedly supports interpretations of violence and defence, and, thus, extrapolates it on the rest of the ringforts.

If we are to understand the possible role ringforts played in supposable Iron Age warfare or conflicts, we need to recognize the primary components behind such conflicts. For example: what were the possible threats? How prominent were they in the daily life on Öland? How was wide scale warfare as well as minor incursions fought on Öland? Did they even occur on the island? Some of these questions have already been asked in the dissertation. However, to answer them, or at least approach the answers, we need to ask ourselves the same question regarding the known evidence from the ringforts that we asked prior in this chapter: what do we see?

With the exception of Eketorp ringfort, excavations and investigations of several of these structures have revealed that they lack clear occupation layers and display relatively few finds of an Iron Age context. Whilst these sites appear to be quite “tidy”, and the activities involving them seem to have occurred sporadically, it is yet possible that they were inhabited. However, given the evidence, it would seem that their function involved sporadic usages, such as temporary living quarters. One such possibility is that they served as places of refuge in times of turmoil, or in other words when possible threats became reality. Their placement at equal distances in the outlands of the agrarian lands and the surrounding of contemporary settlements suggests them being connected to these settlements. This could also support a temporary usage context, since the location away from the agrarian lands could indicate that ringforts were not a normal part of daily life.

Their distinct inland location implies a desire to distance ringforts from the coast, which could in the event that a hostile force were to disembark at the coast and advance into the island indicate the need to provide those connected to the ringforts enough time to seek refuge. An inland location would also have given ringforts more surrounding ground to control, which could otherwise have been wasted if located too close to the sea. Since those controlling the ringfort then would have had a base from where they could initiate organized offensives and also rally to if the situation required it.

The close proximity to wetlands could be a strategy to impede any aggressors’ possible approach towards the ringforts and add further defences to the structures, since the island lacks other natural defences. The high walls would have given any defenders an obvious
strategic advantage of much higher ground, as it also would have provided good shooting range for any bowmen.

Even though the pattern of three gateways seems prominent on Öland, which at first glance could be seen as a high number in terms of defence, this could still be regarded as a grey zone. Whilst two gates could be considered as a well-balanced design, in terms of reducing weak points but still opening up for possibilities for counterattacks, traditional practices and beliefs could have required the choice of three gates, even if the function was primary defensive. This would, however, depend on the primary nature of the possible hostile threats. If we are to assume that the choice of location and construction of ringforts reflects these threats, we can therefore test possible scenarios on the ringforts, and, thus, see where the weaknesses arise.

Suppose that the threat was primarily a full scale invasion with the intention of conquering the island. The ringforts would in this scenario be vital to conquer, since they could then function as control centres and also prohibit Ölanders from using them as rallying-points and, thus, bases for initiating counterattacks. However, in this context the nine gateways of Ismantorp ringfort and Gråborg ringfort undermine this possible scenario, since such many gates are not suitable for defence. Since the ringforts’ water supply in several cases seems to have been on the outside of the forts, the possibility of besieging ringforts, instead of storming them, would in this context be very tempting for any invaders. Starving out any defenders would consequently not have been so time-consuming. Given the evidence, the occurrence of this scenario would, therefore, not seem particularly plausible.

If we instead suppose a scenario in which the threats primarily constituted of minor sporadic incursions, where any aggressors were mainly active along the coastline raiding and plundering their way, then, for example, the number of gateways, proximity to wetlands, and absence of water supply inside would not be as decisive. If basic survival from such incursions was the first priority, then an inland placement would be reasonable, since being a safe distance from the coast in this context would be vital for survival. Whilst a presumably well-organized refuge or rallying system would for a time leave any aggressors to freely raid and plunder the lands along the coastline, one conceivable purpose for the ringforts in this context could have been to also function as safekeeping of valuables. This would have allowed people to not only survive such incursions, but also not to lose their most valuable possessions. For example, a minor garrison could have been stationed in the ringforts at all times to supervise the fort and any valuables inside. The coastal location of Sandby ringfort, however, remains an issue in this context. If the primary nature of the threat was raids and
incursions would not Sandby ringfort have been severely exposed? Because it would be reasonable to assume that any aggressors would have had time to disembark and surround the ringfort before anyone could take refuge in the ringfort. Even if there was a minor garrison maintained in the ringfort, together with the people living on the farms connected to it, they too would risk being cut-off by any hostile forces. It was suggested that the main purposes with an inland location was to give the inhabitants enough time to take refuge and possibly mobilize any defences and countermeasures, and to discourage any aggressors from advancing into the island. Given this evidence, the occurrence of this scenario would also not seem particularly plausible.

If we were to propose something in between these suggested scenarios above, we would still have difficulties of interpretation in regard to the question asked earlier.

In connection to the discussion above, and with regard to the given source material, what traces would, for example, battles have left behind? At first it might seem reasonable to assume that such activities would leave behind bodies and discarded weapons. However, identifying evidence for battles is problematic, since weapons are usually retrieved and those fallen in battle are often buried elsewhere, although not necessarily far away (Harding 2012:178). Sandby ringfort could in this case display the strongest traces of a battle. As mentioned in the analysis, chapter 3, however, it is possible that a battle could have taken place elsewhere.

One further question that arises concerns the explanation of the many deposits of military equipment in the war-booty sacrifice site of Skedemosse in central Öland. If we were to suppose that ringforts played no part in Iron Age warfare, then from where did all these weapons originate? It could be reasonable to assume that these deposits constitute traces of battles occurring on the island. As with the human remains in Sandby ringfort, we can also here see a correlation with the fall of the Roman Empire and the end of the weaponry sacrifices in Skedemosse. These deposits at the site have been dated from late 2nd century AD to well into 5th century AD, where its ending could be seen as roughly or close to the years around 476-480 AD. Whilst the military equipment could have originated from battles waged on Öland, regardless if they were the results of external assaults or even internal conflicts, could they not have originated from battles waged in other geographical regions, such as at the domains of the contemporary Roman Empire? As with the presence of human remains in Sandby ringfort this would imply a large distance of transportation, which also would not only depend on its feasibility, but also what religious beliefs the Ölanders held.
Whilst it would seem plausible that the weapons deposited in Skedemosse could have originated from internal conflicts on the island, it does not necessarily imply that ringforts were involved in such conflicts. This possibility seems unlikely due to the central location of Skedemosse on Öland, indicating the wide-scale collectivity of the site on the island.

If we study the spatial layout of Ölandic ringforts, with houses of equal size and radially joined together, then we would see that it has the appearance of a strictly arranged and planned model. In other words, the construction of ringforts in general appear not to have organically emerged or grown, but rather been built through an explicit design strategy. Investigations has shown that the ringforts at Eketorp and Ismantorp seem to have had more than one construction phase, which changed around 300 AD (see Borg et al. 1976; Andrén 2014), however, from what we can see from other ringforts the common pattern appears to be that they were strictly planned from their very foundation.

An interesting parallel can here be drawn to the Viking Age town Sigtuna at north of Lake Mälaren in the Swedish province of Uppland. The most established interpretations speak of Sigtuna as founded by its king around 980 AD, where the town was planned from its foundation based on an explicit model. According to these interpretations it was the king who gave away plots of land in the town to persons who supported him. The intention with this would have been to create allegiances between him and his supporters. This constituted the basis of a sphere of influence based on a Christian foundation including a system of society, a legal system and a belief-system. Whilst these supporters were most probably already people with social status and with farms of their own in the countryside, this gesture from the king would certainly have created a well-defined social elite of the time in that region (Tesch 2007:93 ff.).

Although these are two different contexts, it is still possible to identify similarities. Since we have established that ringforts display certain élitist traces, it would be reasonable to assume that a form of elite was connected to the ringforts. As mentioned in the analysis, chapter 3, there is evidence suggesting that the construction of ringforts was initiated through collective enterprises from several neighbouring settlements, and that these were connected to the ringforts. Whilst this may have been the case, the initiators from the different settlements could more precisely have been those individuals from the social elite of the different settlements with the necessary power and influence to gather people and initiate such huge projects. We can therefore see the similarities between Sigtuna and Ölandic ringforts, where both phenomena have been planned and built according to explicit models from their
foundation and are clearly associated with a social elite, which have farms of their own outside. Perhaps the plots of land in Sigtuna, where the king’s supporters built their houses and the houses inside ringforts could be viewed in almost the same way. In Sigtuna it is probable that the supporters lived mostly in their original homes on the farms outside the town, and only temporarily in Sigtuna when the king was present (Tesch 2007:97 f.). Each house in the ringfort could have been connected to a certain individual from the social elite and that person’s household. Whilst ringforts could have been regularly inhabited, as mentioned above, it would be plausible to assume that ringforts were used sporadically and not regularly inhabited. This would then further correspond to the context of Sigtuna.

However, what were the reasons for initiating such large projects on Öland? If they were sporadically used, then it would be possible to view them as places of assembly. The houses could have functioned as temporary accommodation for those gathered there while awaiting everyone to assemble and also during the time length of the assembly itself. It is reasonable to assume that collective and individual meals took place at such events.

The location of ringforts in the outlands in the centre of the surrounding settlements in neutral territory could have functioned as a mutual agglutinative element in the landscape and as a bridge between the neighbouring settlements to which everyone was connected. Ringforts could perhaps have constituted suitable bases for administration and organization. This is a very wide concept, which could imply many different functions and purposes, but it does, nevertheless, suggest a form of advanced social structure and organization present on Öland at the time. This would also reflect by the need for administrative functions (see e.g. Graeber 2011).

Parallels can here be drawn with the forts and castles of the Middle Ages, where their function not only included military aspects of fortification and defence, but also administrative functions and purposes of manifesting power together with a symbolic value. Some medieval castles were not even intended as regular fortifications, but instead merely designed and built that appearance (see e.g. Lovén 1999:457 f.; Johnson 2002; Hansson 2011). Such aspects could also have been relevant to Ölandic ringforts, where they could be viewed as prominent manifestations of power for a certain social group. Their presence in the landscape must have had effect on those living on the island, where these structures could have signaled symbolic meanings.

Administrative purposes do, however, not automatically have to imply non-martial contexts, since the very nature of organized warfare and defence requires certain elements of
administration in order to function. It is therefore possible, as Andrén (2014) suggests about Ismantorp ringfort, that they could have functioned as mustering points where war was organized and men were gathered and trained in order to participate in battles on the continent. The spatial layout of ringforts, with houses of equal size and radially placed together, could suggest a form of military order of equality among soldiers. This may necessarily not be the case, since it could as well reflect equality among the different individuals in power. There is evidence that they came from different settlements, where no-one within the assembly perhaps were allowed to distinguish themselves. They were perhaps already distinguished from the rest of the society where the ringforts were the manifestations of this power and status.

Other evidence shows that Ölanders in the late Roman Iron Age and Migration Period acquired solidi by participating in battles involving the Roman Empire, there being strong indications of a warrior elite on Öland at the time. Since the island displays such huge amounts of gold artefacts, the number of solidi must have been even higher in order to be converted into much of these gold items. However, as mentioned in the analysis, chapter 3, one must remember that most of the ringforts seem to have been used well into the Vendel era, about roughly 120-220 years after the fall of the Roman Empire around 480 AD as well as the end of the solidi imports on Öland in 476 AD.

Whilst it is possible that their functions changed in connection to the events occurring down the continent, it could also be so that their original functions continued. Or it could be a matter of secondary functions, such as occasionally mustering points for joint ventures with the intention of acquiring gold, whilst their primary function otherwise was as occasional assembly places for the social elite. At such assemblies administrative functions might have been executed such as jurisdictional powers. However, since gold may have become more difficult to acquire after 480 AD, it could have resulted in a gradual decline for the ringforts, where certain changes in the social structures and social hierarchy eventually made the ringforts obsolete. They would then have been abandoned around 600-700 AD, and at the time when some of them were reused, the social context would again have been completely different, resulting in the adoption of new functions and purposes.
5. Conclusion

Whilst the Ölandic ringforts in several regards display attributes and finds that appear self-evident for interpretations in terms of defence, conflict and violence, the main conclusion of this dissertation is that the problems that arise through such interpretations are too substantial to be disregarded. By analyzing the archaeological evidence known from the Ölandic ringforts and hypothesizing about different possibilities with ringforts viewed as fortifications, this dissertation has clearly emphasized the weaknesses with existing interpretations. Such weaknesses have in earlier archaeological research been either disregarded or treated as exceptions. If these were to be carefully considered, other possibilities would perhaps not be excluded from the debate. This dissertation has, therefore, proposed a way to contribute to a more open and varied discussion of ringforts.

Even though it is the difference between the past and the present that primarily promotes our interest in archaeology, that discipline, nevertheless, often tends to erode that distinction by creating images of the past similar to those of the present. Hence, our understanding of the past becomes coloured by our contemporary assumptions based on, for example, current concepts of religion, philosophy, economics and politics. Whilst this has been accepted as an inevitable fact when studying the past, it is sensible to affirm such differences and emphasize our preconceived ideas (Thomas 1991:1). It should be imperative when studying the past to both recognize and embrace the differences in, for example, intentions, social structure and the conceptual world. The past is too often ascribed certain elements similar to the ones of the present.

At first glance it may seem that this dissertation has aimed to demilitarize the Ölandic ringforts. This in its own way could be viewed as being coloured by the current political and ideological climate. However, the main intention here has been rather to emphasize the weaknesses with existing interpretations of Ölandic ringforts, and especially those where military themes are prominent. Nothing said about these ringforts are entirely set in stone. However, we need to recognize the weaknesses behind the interpretations and consider other possibilities in order to create a more elevated and open discussion, in which we rethink the ringforts of Öland.
6. Summary

In this dissertation the ringforts of the island of Öland in the Baltic Sea to the southeast of Sweden is investigated. It provides a comprehensive and up-to-date catalogue of definite and possible Ölandic ringforts, and a comprehensive survey of the archaeological evidence from the known ringforts presented there. Through this survey, existing interpretations of Ölandic ringforts and in particular those associated with military activity is critically evaluated, and alternative interpretations discussed.

This dissertation emphasizes the weaknesses with existing interpretations of Ölandic ringforts, and argues that further discussion should apply a more variable and nuanced picture in which non-military interpretations and aspects are not excluded from the debate.

Through this dissertation an outline has been presented within which the Iron Age ringforts of Öland can be reinterpreted and rethought.

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