

## **JAAH 2017 No 20 Helgesson & Aspeborg Logbook**

Bertil Helgesson & Håkan Aspeborg 2017. An Iron Age Magnate Farm at Odarslöv – A local centre in the realm of Uppåkra

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## Referee 2

Dear Editors,

On request, I have read and commented on the paper "*An Iron Age Magnate Farm at Odarslöv – A local centre in the realm of Uppåkra*" by Bertil Helgesson & Håkan Aspeborg.

The subject is indeed interesting and the paper would have been great if the authors had kept to the promised content presented in the abstract and in the introduction of the article. However, the text is too sprawling, moving in all possible directions, including too many different subjects, without properly describing them. I also have some other objections and remarks listed below. Therefore, I cannot approve/recommend this article for publication as it stands today, but I do believe that it could be a great and interesting article after major revisions.

### *Content:*

This paper is said to be about a magnate's farm at Odarslöv in Scania, Sweden, dated to the period from the Late Roman Iron Age to the Early Vendel Period, and its relation and importance in local village community and its possible role in a larger region; in relation to other neighbouring settlements, magnate farms and the "central place" at Uppåkra.

This is great, and I really appreciate this perspective and point of departure, but the article would have benefit greatly if only all the listed examples of other sites with large farms in this part of Scania in the text also were illustrated. Instead there are several futile figures chosen by the authors that add nothing or very little to the content (for example, the maps showing stone-settings and ancient field remains, as well as the reconstruction drawings of the hall and the burial ground).

What I mean is that the authors refer to many interesting settlement- and farm sites in the region, but they do not give them enough space, neither with regard to illustrations nor to descriptive text, which would have strengthened their argumentation and lifted the paper to a higher and accepted level. Likewise, illustrations with all these so-called magnate farms, together with other smaller units and the central place Uppåkra, would have improved the article considerably.

In the case of the first chapters, the description - the biography, of the magnate's farm at Odarslöv, and its spatial context, and the chapter about 'The Iron Age settlement pattern in the area', I have no objections at all. This is good and it is this part of the paper (together with two others, see below) that has the potential to be really good with relevant illustrations and comparisons.

The chapters 'Between forest and the plough' and 'A landscape full of transition zones' are full of strange assertions and contradictions and with very little relevant information for the main subject in the paper. They should be lifted out in my opinion.

Then comes chapters 'Farmer, Magnate, Chieftain or King' and 'The elite stratum between the chieftain and the free man' which are quite good, but they need to add some new and more relevant literature to it, particular regarding Early Medieval (AD 400-1000) king- and lordship as well as relevant literature with respect to pre-feudal economic social relations. If so, these

chapters together with the ones mention above have the potential to become something really interesting indeed.

The remaining section of the article contains too many loose statement and strange connections, which content is not important to the article's alleged primary purpose, and so I find it pointless to comment on them further detail than this.

*Originality:*

The aim and purpose of the paper is very good and it could have become a new and important contribution to the understanding of the Iron Age hierarchies and settlement patterns, and their spatial, economic and social conditions in relation to so-called "central-places". This has rarely been thoroughly discussed in Scandinavia previously. Still, it can be a reality, if the authors make some important revisions.

*Structure:*

Unfortunately, as already stated, this paper is not well structured.

*Specific comments*

Page 3 and 35. They should have discussed if there were differences between a hall and a cult house, somewhere between this pages. For instance, if house 116 is too small to be a house where ritual feasting and hospitality were performed, they hint at the end, is it then possible to consider this house as a hall at all?

Page 15, second paragraph, line 20-21

"The political elite in the east lived in central places (Vickham 2005:498)"

They cannot accuse Chris Wickham of this strange statement, when he is referring to Danish archaeologists in that particular book.

Page 19. Second paragraph, line 5,

".., to become so complex that we can call them kingdoms (Wenskus 1961; Näsman 1998; Helgesson 2002).

This is a little bit strange and in many ways an old-fashioned statement, because most early medieval kingdoms in Europe were not particularly complex. With a few exceptions, like the Merovingian kingdom, after Clodvig, and the Visigothic kingdom in Spain, the majority lacked any advanced administration or complex tax-systems. Instead, they usually were edified and held together by ties of kinship and client-systems without any state apparatus, and the overwhelming majority in north-western Europe were very small in comparison with the later kingdoms. Today, there is also a consensus in the field of early medieval kingship research that usually, there were hierarchies of kings and relativities of kingliness often linked to larger regional kingdoms, whose sizes constantly changed, shrank and expanded, altogether depending on how successful the kings of the pyramid were.

Page 23. At the end of the first paragraph, regarding social strata during the Iron Age. Here they use Gregory of Tours "History of the Franks" in a reference, and thereby state regarding different professions, that "prostitutes, bishops, slaves and kings" were among those contemporary professions. This is a really bad and a completely irrelevant assertion for understanding the Iron Age Scania. There is a large amount of literature on the subject today, which they should have used instead.

Page 26. Third paragraph, "The question of how and when land ownership was established in South Scandinavia is controversial....Historians usually attribute it to the Viking Age (cf. Wickham 2005:377). However, I think they meant to refer to his argument regarding when the land became alienable from family- and kin-ties by free peasants, lords and kings, which is addressed in another part of his book, and is something completely different from when landownership was established.

Page 31. Second paragraph. "Ruling a Society"

"As suggested above, the development of the farms at Odarslöv 51 cannot be explained only in a local or regional context" +page 32. Second paragraph. "The establishment of Odarslöv 51....An important event is the Marcomannic Wars..."

It is very hard to follow the disjointed argumentations on these pages and even harder to understand what effect the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain, the Marcomannic Wars, the Huns and the Slavic expansion had to do with the establishment of a largish farm in Scania during the Roman Iron Age.

## **Authors' comments**

We sincerely thank both peer-reviewers for their critique and their suggestions of how to improve our manuscript. We have tried to follow their suggestions as much as possible.

We agree with reviewer 2 that the first manuscript was not well structured, we hope that we have improved it. We also agree with reviewer 2 that it would have strengthen our argument to have a more detailed descriptions and illustrations of the other tentative magnate farms in the area, but that would have required a much longer article.

## **Editor's comment**

The first reviewer has asked the editor not to publish his/her comment on the original manuscript.

Since a misunderstanding of the policy of JAAH has occurred and since the editor considered the comments valuable, the editor have decided to publish the article but not the comments of the first reviewer.