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The Landscape of a Swedish Boat-Grave Cemetery

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Abstract

The paper integrates topographical and experiential approaches to the mortuary landscape of a Viking period boat inhumation-grave excavated in 2005 within a cemetery at Skamby, Kuddby parish, Östergötland province, Sweden. We argue that the landscape context was integral to the performance of the funerary ceremonies and the subsequent monumental presence of the dead in the landscape. We offer a way to move beyond monocausal explanations for burial location based on single-scale analyses. Instead, we suggest that boat-inhumation at Skamby was a commemorative strategy that operated on multiple scales and drew its significance from multiple landscape attributes.

Introduction: Skamby in Östergötland

In 2005, Howard Williams and Martin Rundkvist directed the excavation of a grave in an unusual prehistoric cemetery outside the hamlet of Skamby in Kuddby parish, Östergötland province, Sweden (Rundkvist and Williams 2008; Figure 1). This hitherto unexplored cemetery provided the first opportunity to investigate a boat inhumation grave in the province. While boat-grave cemeteries are well known in the region to the north, near the country's capital, there are only two other cemeteries in Östergötland with similar surface features (Norra Berga in Mjölby parish and Malm in Styrstad parish). Skamby appears different from both of these in terms of the large number of boat inhumations (ten as opposed to three each at the other sites) and arrangement (set in a single line, but forking into two at the east end; Figure 2). The Skamby cemetery is, therefore, unique in Östergötland, and the superstructures of its graves (i.e. irregular polygonal stone pavements) also set it apart from all other Scandinavian boat inhumation sites.

The site is situated on a NW–SE orientated ridge on the Vikbolandet peninsula, in eastern Östergötland on the Baltic Sea (Figure 1). The visible field monuments comprising the cemetery form a discrete burial zone consisting of ten flat oval

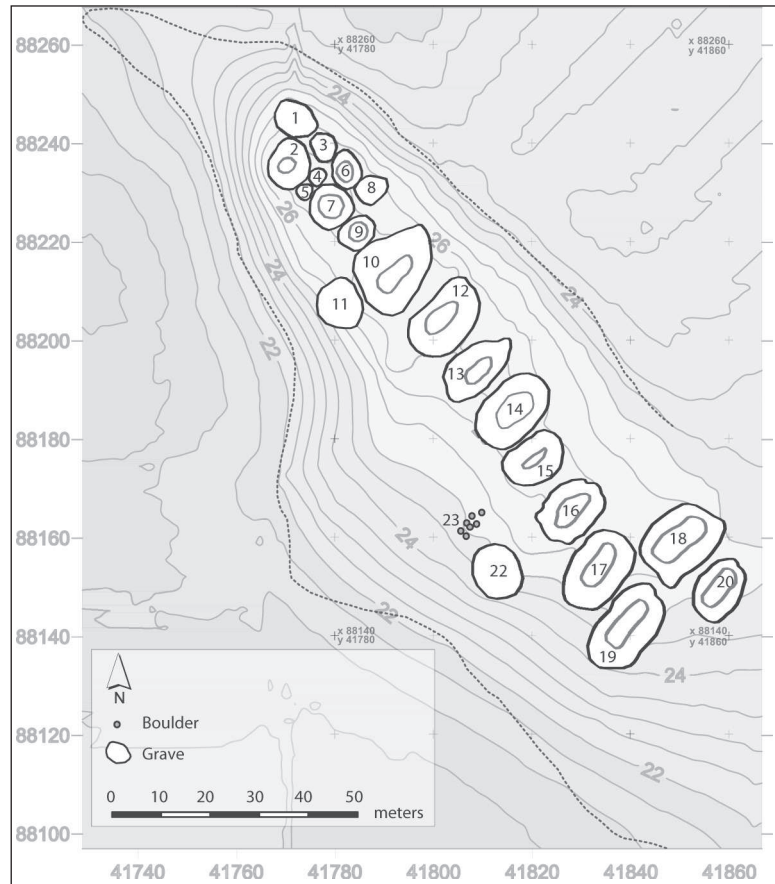


FIGURE 1. The location of the Skamby site in relation to the distribution of Viking Period boat-inhumations in Scandinavia. The dashed line marks the edges of Figure 3. Map by Howard Williams re-drawn and adapted after Müller-Wille 1995, p. 100.

stone settings with diagnostic boat-shaped depressions at their centres and a series of circular stone-settings clustering at the north-west end of the ridge (Figure 2). A metal-detector survey of surrounding fields directed by Martin Rundkvist in 2003 suggested that further graves may have clustered along the foot of the ridge and subsequently been ploughed away.

The smallest oval stone-setting was selected for excavation to minimise disturbance to the site and the project's labour and financial expense, but still to gain an idea of the quality of preservation, date and character of the graves. Excavated over seven weeks in the summer of 2005, grave 15 at Skamby contained iron rivets and a boat-shaped grave-cut indicating the former presence of a vessel

FIGURE 2. A plan of the Skamby cemetery from survey work conducted by Martin Rundkvist and Howard Williams in the 2005 field season. Map by Marcus Andersson.



of around 5 m in length (Rundkvist and Williams 2008, 81–82). Preservation was very poor and there was no surviving human or animal bone. Weapons and containers were also absent. Instead, the repertoire of grave goods was limited to horse gear (an iron shaft-hook, frost nails and a bridle) and personal items (a slate pendant whetstone, a red glass paste bead and possibly a small iron knife). Notably, a collection of 23 amber gaming pieces was placed over, rather than within, the boat. They were scattered amidships when the stones of the monument collapsed downwards, after the grave cut's wooden cover or roof had rotted away (Rundkvist and Williams 2008, 83). The design of the gaming pieces suggests a ninth-century date for the grave (Rundkvist and Williams 2008, 85–86). The presence of only one set of gaming pieces (seemingly placed on the grave in a bag rather than upon a board within the boat) might indicate that these were not associated with the deceased as part of a burial tableau. Instead, we have argued that they were commemorative artefacts in a different sense: they articulated ongoing social relationships and interactions between the survivors and the deceased through the medium of gaming. As an integral aspect of elite lifestyle and leisure, gaming reveals a martial outlook and perhaps also an association with rituals of divination used to secure the successful transition of the deceased to the afterlife (Rundkvist and Williams 2008, 93–97).

On the strength of the evidence from both the material culture and the nature of the stone superstructure, it is possible to suggest, tentatively, an adult male identity for the occupant of the grave (Rundkvist and Williams 2008, 86–87). Despite the limited repertoire, the quality of the gaming set is unparalleled for the region, suggesting a high-status funeral, as might the choice to inter a boat in a seemingly exclusive burial zone together with other boat-graves (Rundkvist and Williams 2008, 87–92). Constructing the irregular eight-sided stone-setting over the grave appears not to have been an excessively labour-intensive undertaking, but its making would have required a number of different work-groups if composed within a day, commensurate with a large group of mourners in attendance. Boat burial is atypical for the region and the presence of a stone superstructure is rarely found elsewhere for boat-graves, suggesting that the Skamby cemetery reflects the particular burial choices of a local group – perhaps one wealthy family – over many decades, even centuries. This family or group was adapting, rather than simply emulating, the boat-grave burial customs of certain sites (such as the famous cemeteries of Vendel and Valsgärde) in the Lake Mälaren area. This strategy may have served to articulate their claims over land and genealogy, as well as to assert their political allegiances (Rundkvist and Williams 2008, 92–93).

Boat-graves and their landscapes

Boat inhumation-graves represent a widely distributed and varied aspect of early medieval mortuary practices in Scandinavia, as well as parts of the Baltic, north-west Europe, the British Isles and the North Atlantic. In this paper we use ‘early medieval’ in the Continental and now widely-established British usage to refer to the period *c.*A.D. 400–1100. In Sweden, however, which saw no Roman conquest, this era is called the ‘Late Iron Age’ and is divided into the Migration, Vendel and Viking periods. The Vendel period’s dates are *c.*A.D. 540–790 (Müller-Wille 1970). These burials form part of a broader panoply of boat uses in ritual contexts in this period; boats served as ‘coffins’ and grave-covers, and boat-fragments could serve as grave furnishings. They appear in certain cremation deposits as hundreds of iron clench nails, where they have been placed upon, or formed fuel for, funerary pyres. Boats may also have been broken up or set adrift to be sunk or burned upon water during funerals. Elsewhere, boats are materialised in stone-settings (e.g. Hansson 1998; Vestergaard 2007; Høilund Nielsen 2009) or depicted on commemorative monuments (e.g. Andrén 1993). Only some of these practices left clear archaeological traces, and where known, they vary in prevalence at local and regional scales (e.g. Svanberg 2003).

Despite these varied practices, boat-inhumation was a distinctive choice and one that has attracted numerous interpretations. The occupants of the boats are often regarded as an élite with both socio-political and cultic attributes. Boats might commemorate an élite lifestyle (including transport for warfare, trade, hunting and fishing) as much as giving material presence to the aspiration for an afterlife journey (Hansson 1998, 61; Harrison 2008, 16). More specifically, travel by boat has been suggested as a metaphor employed for the aristocratic life

course and embodying the biography of a ‘good’ aristocratic death (Herschend 2001, 68). Boats might even be regarded as ‘residences’ for the dead comparable to their halls (Herschend 2001, 82). Some writers have emphasised boat-burial as a theatrical performance with heroic and mythological components, Anders Andrén (1993, 50), seeing the mythological allusions of the material culture of both Gotlandic picture-stones and boat-graves from the Mälaren area as panegyric poetic genres honouring the dead. Likewise, Neil Price (2008) draws upon Ibn Fadlan’s tenth-century account of a Rus funeral on the River Volga to argue that each boat-funeral was a unique, embodied and mythological performance. Kristina Jennbert (2006; see also Williams 2006) is more explicit about the use of material culture in boat-inhumations. She regards the tenth-century boat-burial interred beneath a mound at Ladby, Denmark, as an ‘heroic’ composition, incorporating artefacts, sacrificed animals and the boat itself as material agents that constituted social memories through ritual practice. From this perspective, boats conveyed and constituted cultural memories and mythologies through the roles they played in burial rituals (see also Williams 2010).

Yet these interpretations remain largely artefact-focused and site-specific (but see Anderson 1983; Harrison 2007). How did the landscapes of boat-graves affect the sociopolitical and religious perceptions and identities of those performing and witnessing the funerals? How did boat-graves subsequently interact with their landscape settings? Boats were a means of transport and their presence may have evoked one element of the funerary procession to the cemetery. Once at the cemetery, their size demanded a particular scale of grave and monumental covering. Boats both created ritual processions and defined a distinctive monumental grave in the landscape. Moreover, there is evidence that certain boat-inhumations were left open for some time (Gansum 2004); boats appear to be associated with long drawn-out mortuary procedures and served as places for the dead that accrued meaning as they both decayed and became monumentalised. But what does this mean from a landscape perspective? We would argue that boat-inhumation was a distinctive practice, not only because it may have articulated a particular type of afterlife ‘journey’ and a distinctive mix of retrospective and prospective memories (commemorating past life and future destination), it also installed the dead into the landscape in a distinctive manner.

Within the burgeoning literature on the landscape context of early medieval burial sites, boat-inhumations are an important avenue to explore the ‘power of place’ and the ‘power of the funeral’ to create identities in relation to perceived history and cosmology (Härke 2001). With this aim in mind, we wish to focus the discussion on the Skamby cemetery as a case study. We aim to highlight the potential of boat-graves in these wider debates about late first millennium A.D. burial location. If boat-inhumation graves in particular can be regarded as strategic statements made by the survivors to promote their identities (Andrén 1993; Price 2008), then it is necessary to consider the landscape as not only providing a backdrop to, but being an integral component of, burial performance or mortuary theatrics. To this end, the study here outlines an approach to the Skamby cemetery’s landscape.

Mortuary landscapes: theory and method

If boat inhumation created a distinctive relationship with, and drew upon, its landscape setting to commemorate the dead, we need a method to investigate Skamby's landscape setting. This is certainly hampered by the fact that many questions remain unanswered about the date-range and full character of the Skamby cemetery, and fieldwork has yet to be undertaken to investigate the rest of the cemetery and the likely locations of coeval settlements and burial sites close by. Yet based upon available data, including the National Heritage Board's online database of archaeological sites, we hope to show that Skamby's landscape setting is crucial to understanding the cemetery.

We integrate two theoretical and methodological perspectives in developing our argument. For the regional context, Martin Rundkvist (in press) has recently completed a systematic archaeological synthesis of Östergötland's late-first millennium A.D. elite residences, based on both published and unpublished sources, as well as wide-ranging fieldwork. This approach draws upon a wider tradition of investigating early medieval territories and central places from the distribution of archaeological sites, find-spots and, to some extent, place names (e.g. Fabech and Ringtved 1995; Brink 1999; Fabech 1999; 2006; see also Rundkvist 2007). It finds parallels in a range of studies of early medieval territory and political geography in British archaeology incorporating burial locations (e.g. Brookes 2007; Semple 2008; Sanmark and Semple 2008). We can note regional studies of burial location in Scandinavia looking at broad trends in spatial patterns for high-status burial sites, but most of these have been applied to the Lake Mälaren region (e.g. Ljungkvist 2006; Bratt 2008). For Östergötland, no comparable province-wide study has been attempted, though Selinge (1986) and L. K. Larsson (2005) offer good local surveys. A full analysis of burial location and associations is beyond the scope of this study. However, by building on the broad distribution of data, we can scrutinise how Skamby is situated in relation to the contrasting ecological zones of Östergötland, broad patterns in land-use, place-names and archaeological sites and (in particular) burial locations.

In order to investigate Skamby's immediate context, we combine these regional and local data with a more intuitive experiential approach to landscape. This incorporates field observations made by traversing the immediate environs of the cemetery and comparing its location with others by visiting many dozens of first millennium A.D. cemetery sites in the region (during the 2005 field season and subsequently in 2006, 2007 and 2009). This 'phenomenological' approach was initially advocated in British prehistory in order to create 'thick descriptions' of monuments and their landscape settings (e.g. Tilley 1994; Watson 2001; Cummings *et al.* 2002; Cummings and Whittle 2004). Famously, the influential landscape archaeologist Andrew Fleming (1999; 2005) has dismissed these approaches for the British Neolithic in no uncertain terms, particularly regarding what he sees as their proponents' inability to adopt a rigorous methodology for field observation and demonstrating the significance of spatial and visual relationships. Fleming clearly

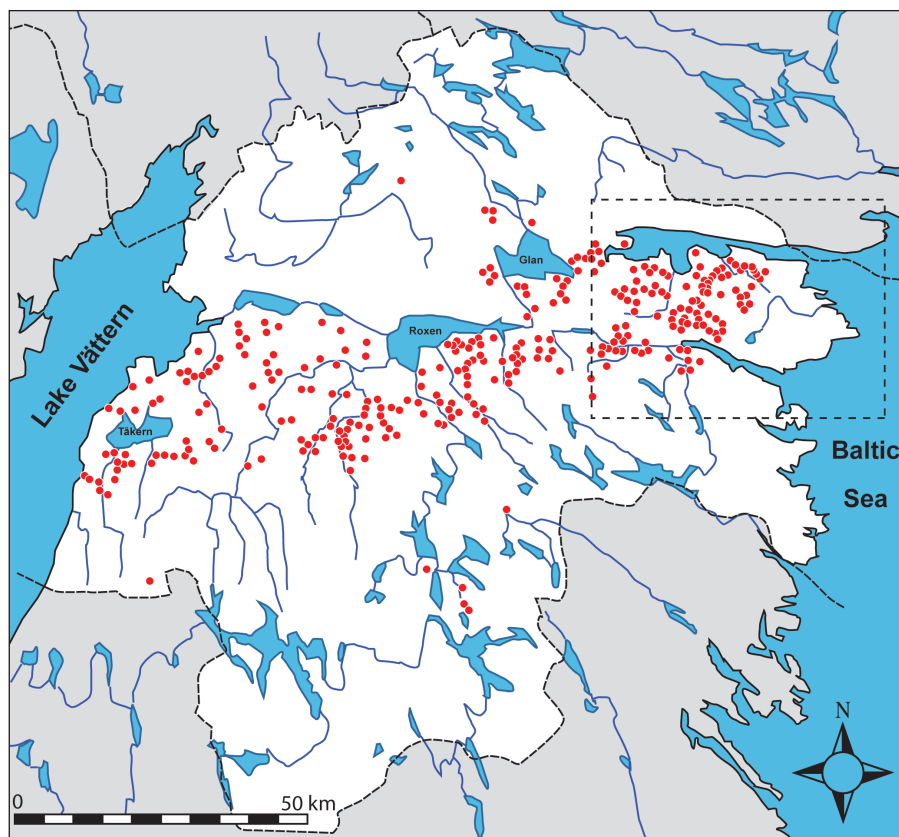


FIGURE 3. Map of Östergötland and the distribution of *-stad* farm names dating from the later first millennium A.D. The dashed line marks the edges of Figure 4. Map by Howard Williams re-drawn after Franzén 1937.

hits the mark in criticising ambiguous and rhetorical statements and errors in landscape observation, but he does not inform the reader what burden of proof is required of ‘common sense’ observations regarding monument location. Nor does Fleming present a valid alternative for investigating burial location in past landscapes. Regardless of the ongoing debate regarding the study of Neolithic and Bronze Age landscapes, there are at least three reasons why Fleming’s critique should not prevent studies of early medieval graves from integrating the experiential landscape approach.

1. The early medieval landscape is far better understood than that of later prehistory, and we can integrate many more strands of evidence in its reconstruction. As well as the topography and known field monuments, we can include data from excavations and casual find-spots, field-walking, aerial photography, metal-detector finds as well as the analysis of historic documents, maps and place-names (e.g. Williams 2004; Chester-Kadwell 2009).
2. In contrast to some early ‘phenomenological’ studies that asserted single reasons for burial and monument location, early medieval archaeologists exploring mortuary landscapes have adopted a multi-causal approach to placing the dead (e.g. Williams 1999; Thäte 2009). Burial location was often a compromise between these different influences, some overt and deliberate, others that may only have accrued once a site had been established.

3. A multi-scalar approach allows early medieval archaeologists to strengthen further their landscape analysis. In other words, it is necessary to consider microtopography and locality in combination with broader regional landscape history (see Williamson 2008).

A review of these approaches for British early medieval archaeology has been offered elsewhere (Williams 2006), but more recent studies by Stuart Brookes (2007), Stephen Harrison (2007), Sarah Semple (2008) and Mary Chester-Kadwell (2009) deserve special note. Of particular relevance to our study of Skamby are attempts to explore the multiple factors affecting the location of a single high-status site. Here we might cite the precedent of the work of Härke (1994) and Williams (1999) regarding the landscape context of the seventh-century weapon burial on Lowbury Hill, Oxfordshire; Julian D. Richards' appraisal of the location of the Viking cremation cemetery at Ingleby (Richards 2004) and studies by Williams (2001), Carver (2005) and Williamson (2008) of the Sutton Hoo cemetery's landscape setting. Likewise, within Scandinavian archaeology there is a long established tradition of interpreting the locations of burial sites in relation to territories and socio-political structures (see above; also Ambrosiani 1983; Anderson 1983) and more recently concerning sacred geographies (e.g. Fabech 1999; 2006; Hedeager 2002; Herschend 2008) and cemeteries as sites of memory (Wessman 2010, 67–81). These have included both the study of the landscape settings of specific burial mounds (e.g. Gansum and Østigård 2004) as well as studies of the factors affecting burial location such as monument reuse, proximity to routes and boundaries and relationships with water and topography (e.g. Rudebeck 2002; Thäte 2007; 2009; Zachrisson 1998).

Building on the approaches cited above, the potential for further fieldwork at Skamby to reveal more of its landscape context is considerable. We cannot hope to provide any definitive interpretation of the site, nor its landscape context in this paper. Yet by combining different scales and methods of analysis, we begin to approach how Skamby operated as a “place of power” and a “site of memory” in the early medieval landscape (see Härke 2001; Wessman 2010) by mixing traditional and phenomenological approaches and looking at different scales of landscape. Following a framework advocated by Williams (2006), we suggest that Skamby's location is pivotal for understanding how boat inhumations were intended to mediate social memories for a local élite group through the procession and performance of the funerals and the enduring presence of the dead in the landscape. Boat inhumation can be seen as a performance that configured a sense of inherited, invented, imagined and inhabited *place* (Williams 2006, 198–200). A multi-scalar approach to Skamby's location and landscape context reveals the dynamic interplay of topography, place and the performance of funerals in constituting memories and identities in late first millennium A.D. Scandinavia.

Regional landscapes: Skamby and Östergötland

From a topographical point of view, Skamby is far from central within Östergötland, being located at the extreme eastern end of the fertile plains belt

in which settlement clustered during the era under study. Qualitatively speaking, however, finds from Skamby mark it as one of the province's strongest candidates for a Viking period elite settlement site, being second only to Aska in Hagebyhöga parish in the north-western corner of the plains belt (Rundkvist in press). Unlike Aska, where rich grave finds have been made by farmers and a major barrow still stands, Skamby owes its status as a known Viking period elite hot-spot mainly to selective fieldwork by archaeologists. Both sites are located in dense concentrations of other coeval elite indicators.

Skamby was on the edge of the early medieval settlement pattern. Moving westward from the site, one can traverse over 110 km of rich agricultural land interspersed with a few small woods before reaching the shore of Lake Vättern. Heading east from Skamby, within a couple of kilometres one enters the Vikbolandet peninsula's hilly and rocky end that has remained heavily wooded to this day. Skamby therefore sits near an ecological zone boundary that has, judging from the national sites-and-monuments register, remained largely static since before A.D. 1. Yet, to regard Skamby simply as sitting on a land-use boundary overlooks the maritime aspect. Skamby is also on a zonal boundary between the rivers and lakes of inland Östergötland and the inlets and islands of the Baltic coast. This duality helps explain the broad significance of the boat-inhumation cemetery's strategic position.

We can support this assertion through many independent sources of evidence. Place-names provide support for the historical dimension to this pattern, showing a strong concentration of the era's ubiquitous *-stad* and *-by* farmstead-names throughout the plains belt west of Skamby (Figure 3; Franzén 1937; 1982). They correlate with the distribution of early medieval cemeteries which reveals the areas of habitation, even though actual settlement remains are rarely visible and known. Likewise, Skamby lies at the eastern edge of the distributions of silver hoards and rune-stones dating from the ninth through to the eleventh centuries A.D. Although settlement expanded into the forests to either side of the plains belt during the later Middle Ages, the location and density of historic-era churches broadly indicates population concentrations; their distribution again shows Skamby at the edge of the province's inhabited part (Figure 4). While the elite appear to have circulated among their estate centres in the later first millennium, and central places and any territorial divisions shifted over time, the overall extent and areas of population seem to have persisted.

It is also worth noting that Skamby is far to the east of the Götavirke (Figure 4), a 3.4 km long rampart-and-ditch structure strategically erected in the ninth or tenth century (Nordén 1938, 240–255; Stjerna 1999). It was designed to keep out seaborne invaders entering Östergötland by way of the long, narrow inlet of Slätbaken and Rivers Storån/Lillån. The inlet was also closed with a barrage of wooden posts in the seabed at the Stegeborg narrows around the same time (Figures 4 and 5; Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, 203; Rundkvist in press w. refs). To the east of the Götavirke is the province's highest concentration of Late Roman and Migration Period hillforts, demonstrating the Vikbolandet peninsula's exposed situation long before the Viking period.

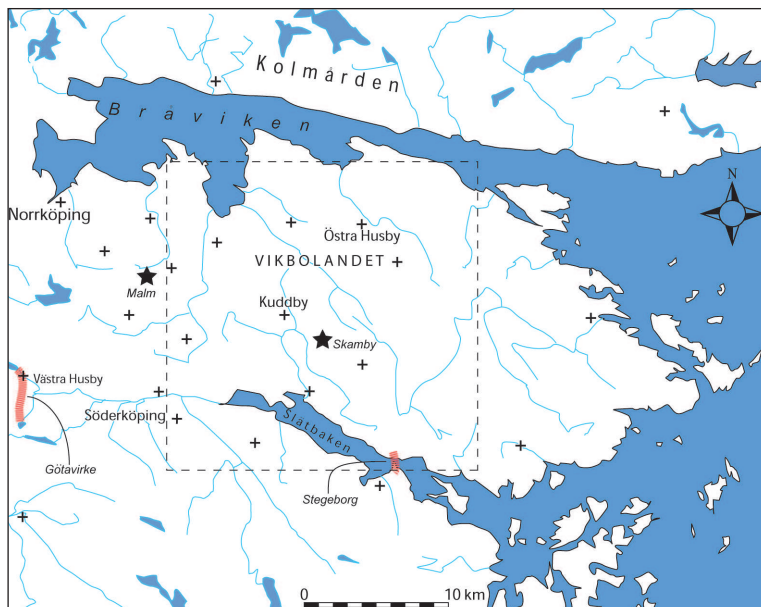


FIGURE 4. Map of the Vikbolandet peninsula showing the location of the boat-graves at Skamby and Malm, the 9th/10th century linear earthwork known as the 'Götavirke', the coeval maritime barrage at Stegeborg, and the distribution of historic-era church sites. The dashed line marks the edges of Figures 5–7.

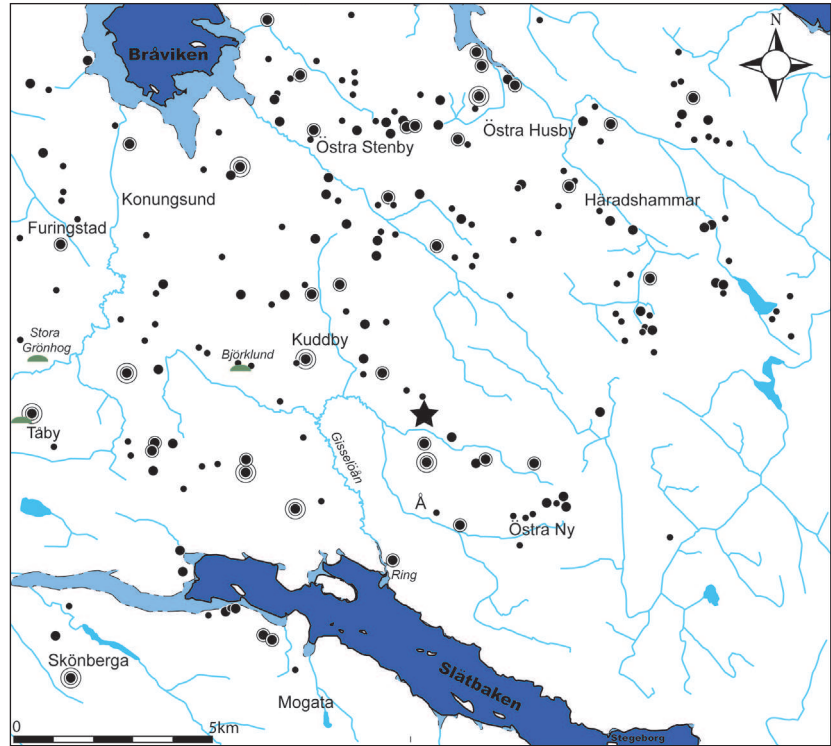
Skamby's location is thus comparable to Ambrosiani's (1983) assessment of the marginal situation of the boat-grave cemetery of Vendel in Uppland. Rather than being central to its region, he argued that Vendel was located on the northern edge of, but just within, the densely settled areas of Uppland's fertile plains. By the same token, Vendel is situated just south of the less fertile and wooded territories that only became inhabited from the later Middle Ages onward. The parish may indeed be seen as a mid-first millennium colonisation area (Seiler 2001).

Local landscapes: Skamby and Vikbolandet

If we move down to the scale of the local landscape, it becomes clear that Skamby is situated centrally on the Vikbolandet peninsula between two long narrow inlets of the Baltic: Bråviken to the north and Slätbaken to the south (Figure 4). The site's relationship with ecological zones is clearer still at this local level; Skamby is near the central point of the peninsula and only just west of the boundary between the open landscape of the western half and the wooded hills of the eastern half. Again, we can see that this pattern has deep historical roots going back to at least A.D. 1. This is revealed in the overall distribution of prehistoric cemeteries, the vast majority of which are likely to have been in use sometime in the first millennium A.D. (Figure 5). Hillforts of likely mid-first millennium A.D. date are found on higher ground away from concentrations of cemeteries, and their distribution extends further east, but even they are not found in the far east of Vikbolandet (Figure 6). Viking period rune-stones and medieval church sites broadly confirm the foci of population by the tenth to twelfth centuries A.D. (Figure 7).

Immediately to the east of Skamby, the only activity is seen in the little parish of Östra Ny. It has several first-millennium farmstead names and a cluster of cemeteries, but the parish name means "Eastern New Church" which marks it

FIGURE 5. Map of central Vikbolandet centred on Skamby (marked by a black star) showing the distribution of cemeteries. The four sizes of cemetery are: 10–25 monuments, 25–50 monuments, 50–100 monuments and 100+ monuments. Most are undated and some burials may belong to the Bronze Age, but the majority of the cemeteries are likely to have been in use for some part of the period 200 B.C. to A.D. 1000. The region's three 'great barrows' are also noted. The one at Täby has been dated by excavation to the Late Bronze Age, the other two are undated. One may have served as a Viking period assembly site, giving the name of its parent farm to Björkekind hundred. The cemetery distribution broadly indicates the extent of first millennium A.D. settlement and the still-visible commemorative 'inheritance' of the Skamby boat-grave. An estimation of Viking period sea-level is marked in light blue.



as late among Östergötland's congregations. The earliest known structure on the church site dates only from the thirteenth century and it clearly marks a settlement on the very periphery.

In addition to being positioned on this east/west divide, Skamby appears to be adjacent to a north/south divide on the peninsula. Concentrations of population and power seem to have focused principally to the north of Skamby on the Bråviken-facing side of Vikbolandet (Figures 5 to 7). Skamby is separated from this area by a NW–SE spine of higher hills, many of which were used for hillforts earlier in the first millennium A.D, but where cemeteries are rare and small (Figure 5). It appears that settlement stretched further eastwards to the north of this divide (Figures 5 to 7). A succession of first millennium A.D. elite foci has been recognised in Östra Husby parish, the focus of Östkind hundred, reflecting 'administration, organisation and regal power' (Figures 5 to 7; Brink 2004: 214; Rundkvist in press). Here we have place-names denoting a mid-first millennium elite settlement (*Tuna*; Olsson and Rundkvist 2008), an assembly site with apparent pre-Christian roots (*Lytisberg*, "hill of the lot-caster"), an eleventh-century royal manor (*Husby*), a high medieval manor (*Bosgården*), and, less exclusively seen in the wider regional context, a sacred grove (*Lunda*). Near Lunda is the farmstead of Oklunda (Figure 6) on a small rocky hill, into which has been carved a ninth-century runic inscription that is remarkable both for its early date and for its unusual content (Gustavson 2003). The Oklunda inscription ranks with the Forsa ring as one of a very few pieces of contemporary written evidence for Viking period judicial practice. It also

makes Oklunda the only place where the location of a *vi*, a first-millennium sanctuary, is known to an accuracy of a few metres.

In contrast, the southern side of Vikbolandet appears to have a similar density of population but over a smaller area. This is largely due to the topography, where the southern shores of the peninsula are steep cliffs from which the ground slopes slowly northward into the Bråviken inlet. The distribution of medieval churches shows a heavy preference for the north-facing watersheds of the peninsula leading to Bråviken; eleven churches are on the northern watersheds, five on the southern ones (Figure 4). The same pattern is evident in the size and number of prehistoric cemeteries (Figure 5).

Interestingly, the numbers of surviving rune-stones and the number of sites with rune-stones (since some sites have produced multiple rune-stones) are both roughly equally distributed between the north and south of the peninsula. For the north of Vikbolandet, those in Östkind hundred, plus those at Furingstad church in Lösing hundred, give a total of 20 rune-stones (Figure 7; Sawyer 2003, 231–33). For the south, Björkekind hundred has produced 21 rune-stones, most located in a corona around Skamby from Örminge to Östra Ny (Figure 7; Sawyer 2003, 228–29). In other words, the south has a higher concentration of Viking period elite commemoration within its smaller area, perhaps related to the strategic significance of this southern coast in the Viking period (see below).

On a local level, Skamby is off the beaten track if we consider the possible lines of the principal land routes. The *eriksgata*, a royal itinerary described in 13th century law codes, has long been used to speculate about earlier major routes of movement and the wealthiest estates where kings would stay. Archaeologists have frequently projected it back into the later first millennium A.D. (Fabech 2001, 191), and interpretations of the antiquity and character of this route often resort to circular argument. Be that as it may; it is likely that an early route passed south from the Bråviken crossing from Kvarsebo to Östra Husby and then continued past Kuddby church with its assembly site (see below), on to Tåby church and then beyond into the region's interior (Cnattingius 1944). A side-road from Kuddby church may also have passed Skamby on its way to the narrows of Stegeborg on the Slätbaken inlet, where, as we have seen a barrage was built and manned at least intermittently in the Viking period (Figures 3 and 4). There is, however, no denying that even if these roads were used before A.D. 1000, Skamby was on a side-road rather than a main route of communication.

It is more profitable to consider Skamby in relation to its maritime connections. The cemetery lies in a shallow valley within Vikbolandet's south-facing water catchment. Measured as the crow flies, the site is closer to the southern inlet, but this is deceptive. The cemetery ridge is near the Gisselöån stream whose source is only c.3 km to the ESE. The stream, currently canalised near the cemetery, runs to the WNW for a further c.2.5 km before winding 4.5 km southwards to reach the Slätbaken inlet at Ring, right by the ruin of Å parish's medieval church. This made for a circuitous route of c.7 km for any vessel to be rowed or (more likely) hauled to get to Skamby (Figures 5–7). Moreover, as mentioned, the southern coast of Vikbolandet is rocky and hilly. The stream today is small and would be

difficult for large vessels to negotiate, particularly in summer. The higher sea-level in the Viking period would have made little difference to this circuitous journey (Figures 5 and 6). While the modern appearance and historic maps offer little help in appraising its navigability in the past, there is every reason to suspect that it would have been shallower but wider prior to canalisation. Hence, seagoing vessels can be supposed to have reached farms in the neighbourhood of Skamby, albeit with some difficulty. Even if the stream was navigable in the past, it did not lead anywhere further than the site's vicinity. While the Slätbaken inlet itself would have allowed direct access to Östergötland's interior via rivers and lakes (a route later embellished by the location of the medieval town of Söderköping and later still by the construction of the Göta canal), the small stream was a veritable cul-de-sac for travellers. Skamby, therefore, is located on a backwater, away from major maritime routes. In this regard, it is worth noting one of the province's two other cemeteries with surface-traces of boat inhumations at Malm in Styrstad parish, 13 km to the north-west of Skamby (Figure 4). The Malm cemetery is on a watershed between streams feeding into Bråviken to the north and Lake Ensjon to the west. This is as far as it is possible to take boats from open water and it is also a maritime cul-de-sac disconnected from the main routes of navigation into Östergötland's interior.

Yet, for seafarers heading westward along Vikbolandet's southern coast from the Baltic, Ring marks the first entry-point into the interior of Vikbolandet after they have passed over 22 km of almost continuous rocky coastline (Figure 4). Indeed, passing Ring westward, traders, raiders and other sea-borne travellers would find no other access route until they reached the inner end of the Slätbaken inlet with the site of the vast late-Roman or migration period hillfort of Ramunderberget (Figure 5), below which the town of Söderköping was to develop from the thirteenth century. Ring was also a natural harbour; a west-facing inlet in an otherwise south-facing coast. It is located c.7 km west of the Stegeborg narrows with its Viking period sea defences. The people controlling Ring were inside this perimeter and would have been able to monitor traffic along Slätbaken. Anyone wishing to make landfall and head north through the single substantial break in the coastal hills had to get past them. In the Viking period, when the shoreline here was around 3.5 m higher than today, Slätbaken would have penetrated a short distance into the high ground that defends the southern edge of the peninsula at Ring. Furthermore, in this area the late-Roman and migration-period predecessors (and perhaps ancestors) of the communities in question constructed a number of hillforts, one of which, Boberget (Figure 5), is sited to overlook Gisselöån to the north-west of Ring and could easily be reoccupied in times of crisis, though it has yielded no post-sixth century finds. The fact that there was a church at Ring in this unusual exposed location suggests an armed community here to defend it. In short, near Ring and the Å church ruin that is situated adjacent to the stream close to its mouth, we have a likely station for a guard-post and even a trading site. This site might have been controlled by the local élite whose farms would have been situated inland. Ring is in fact opposite a Husby royal manor of the eleventh and twelfth centuries on Slätbaken's southern coast in the parish of Mogata.

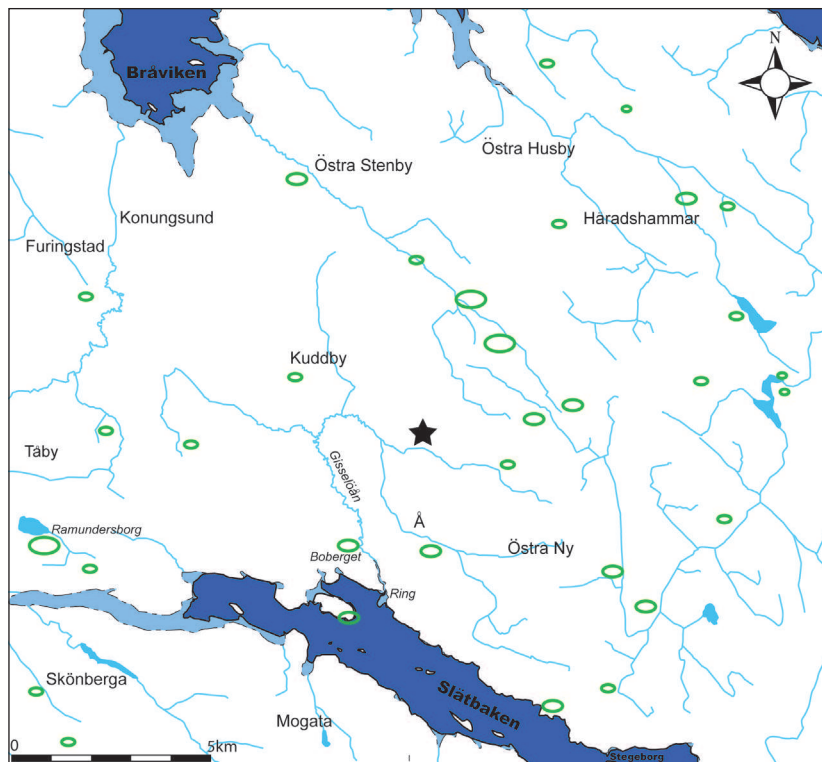
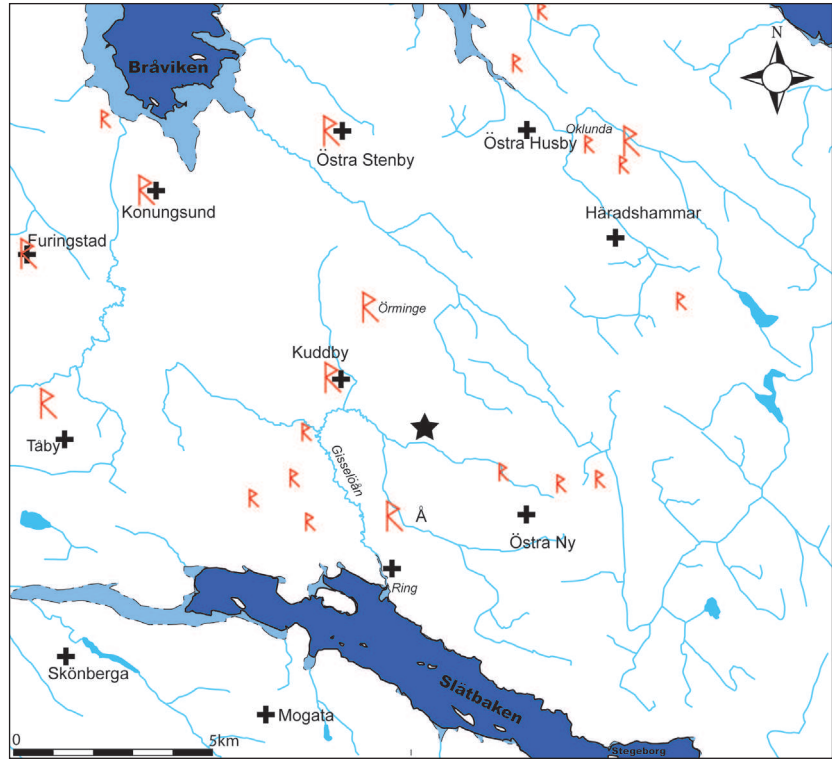


FIGURE 6. Map of central Vikbolandet centred on Skamby (marked by a black star) showing the distribution of first millennium A.D. hillforts, most likely dating from the Late Roman and Migration Periods. The four sizes of hillfort relate to maximum diameter: <100 m; 100–200 m; 200–300 m and >300 m. The distribution shows a concentration on higher ground in the centre of the peninsula away from the concentrations of cemeteries identified in Figure 5. These sites may have been long abandoned for regular use by the time of the Skamby boat-graves, but they were available for emergency use and as lookout points. They also remained a tangible monumental presence on the hills encircling the Skamby cemetery.

This speculation is supported by the fact that there are a large number of cemeteries of first millennium A.D. type in a 5 km arc from west to south of Skamby (Figure 5). Several large ones are near Ring and the Å church ruin, where the stream passing Skamby empties into the Slätbaken inlet. Others are known equidistant between Ring and Skamby, at Linneberga and Brännestad. South-west of Skamby there are large cemeteries at Lundby and Hjärterum and west of Skamby there are a number of cemeteries around Kuddby church and Bjärstad. Other cemeteries are near the ridge with the boat graves. This pattern suggests that Skamby was situated within a discrete cluster of coeval farms.

As mentioned, Kuddby parish and its environs are one of Viking period Östergötland's densest concentrations of élite indicators as they are currently known. The nearest potential élite residences to Skamby are to the west near Kuddby church. The church itself is recorded as a hundred assembly site in 1386 and may have held this function before the church was built. Alternatively, the assembly may have been held at a large mound 1.5 km to the west at Björklund, as hinted by the name of Björkekind hundred. Vikbolandet's two other large mounds are found close by to the west (Figure 5). 1 km to the north of Kuddby church is the farm of Tägneby: one of only five *Tägneby* place names in Östergötland suggestive of an élite farm (cf. "thane"; Rundkvist in press). Nearby is the site of a short-twig runic inscription at Örminge, one of only seven from Östergötland (Rundkvist in press). It seems reasonable to postulate this site as the northernmost extent of a territory (or group of farms) most closely associated with the Skamby cemetery.

FIGURE 7. Map of central Vikbolandet centred on Skamby (marked by a black star) showing the distribution of Viking period rune-stones (denoted by a small R for one rune-stone, a large R for multiple rune-stones in the same location) and medieval churches (marked by a cross). Most rune-stones date from A.D. 1000–1050. Both classes of evidence serve as crude indicators of the concentrations of late first millennium and early second millennium A.D. settlement. More specifically, the rune-stones suggest that the area around Kuddby remained a focus of elite settlement and commemorative expression following conversion to Christianity.



From this evidence it can be concluded that Skamby sits in the home-territory of a group of late first millennium farms that played a strategic role in trade and military operations linking the Baltic and Östergötland's interior. It was situated adjacent to these local concentrations of people and power. Although the hillforts of Vikbolandet were built and used in an earlier period, it is interesting to note that Skamby's approaches are defended by a circle of these fortified sites. Skamby appears to be among the furthest inland one could get from the sea by boat and was therefore perhaps the safest place on Vikbolandet from seaborne raiders. In fact, it may have been impossible to reach it from the coast by water *or* land without passing by at least two hillforts. With its northern side framed closely by large wooded hills and its southern and western sides protected by the most likely sites for coeval farms, Skamby's location can be considered a well-protected cul-de-sac rather than a public 'front-door' situation (in contrast to the Valsgårde boat-grave cemetery's suggested boundary location, see Herschend 2008, 5–6; see also Skre 2007, 383 for Kaupang in Norway).

Immediate landscapes: Skamby within Kuddby parish

But why was the boat-grave cemetery located specifically on a ridge at Skamby; why not elsewhere in the upper watershed of the Gisselöån stream and its tributaries? The precise reason may remain hidden until coeval settlements are excavated. However, while our consideration of the regional and local landscape settings suggest socio-

political and military explanations for the cemetery's position, we postulate that its precise location can be understood in relation to the demands of mortuary theatre and its underlying cosmological principles rooted in cultural memory. We argue that the immediate topography of Skamby was utilised to orchestrate the experience of the funerary processions: a place was chosen that offered a prominent and theatrical setting for the funerals and perhaps other commemorative rituals (see also Wessman 2010). The choice of a prominent ridge helped to make the funeral memorable and created a place inhabited by the dead. Moreover, we suggest that the location enhanced connections to inherited, imagined and invented pasts and myths through the medium of landscape (Williams 2006, 198–200).

The Skamby boat-graves are on a low ridge that afforded views over the surrounding flat and open country from which the cemetery can be seen (Figures 2, 8, 9 and 11). In broad terms, this location is comparable to that of many coeval cemeteries in the plains of Östergötland, including others of the first millennium in the immediate vicinity. For example, this is the pattern for all the sites both east and upstream towards Östra Ny and west and downstream towards Kuddby and then south and downstream to Ring. In the immediate environs, though, Skamby has distinctive features that it does not share with any of these other sites. Most cemeteries in the area have valley-side locations but Skamby is instead located on one of only three ridges that sit in a line *within* the surrounding plain on the north side of the Gisselöån stream (Figure 8). With the exception of stone settings and mounds on one of the other two ridges east-south-east of Skamby (Hageby: Raä Kuddby 159:1), most of the other surviving cemeteries in the area are located on the valley sides or higher ridges between valleys (e.g. Raä Kuddby 131:1; Raä Kuddby 139:1; Raä Kuddby 164:1; Raä Å 27:1; Raä Östra Ny 93:1). Many are close to water, but the valley location of the Skamby boat-grave cemetery makes it one of those most low-lying and closest to the Gisselöån stream (Figure 10). Furthermore, before Gisselöån was canalised in post-medieval times, the valley floor south of the ridge was likely a small lake or fen, so the water may have been closer still. It is from here that boats would have been hauled on their final journey to the grave; whether containing the body or joining it at the cemetery (Figure 8). This location afforded the potential for all-round views from the cemetery and views of the boat-graves from all approaches, in contrast to the more directed view-sheds enjoyed by most nearby cemetery locations (see Anderson 1983, 33). The ridge therefore has something of an 'island' quality sitting above its immediate surroundings (Figures 9 and 11). This was an appropriate choice of location for a public and theatrical funerary rite that may have involved a lengthy procession by water from the coast.

The cemetery was not only situated to be prominent for those inhabiting and traversing the local landscape, but also to be encircled and intervisible with existing cemeteries on all sides. Therefore, Skamby enjoyed a distinctive relation to the *inhabited* landscape of both the living and the dead. While this is difficult to substantiate, it is notable that the Skamby site itself does not seem to have harboured an ancient cemetery; the widespread practice of monument reuse by Viking period sites is not seen here (see Harrison 2007; Thäte 2007; Wessman 2010). A fallen orthostat north of the ridge and an Early Roman Period brooch found nearby by

metal detector suggest that there was a cemetery nearby around A.D. 100. But then there is no further evidence of burial until after A.D. 800. Instead, the 2005 excavation revealed that grave 15 was built over the site of a far earlier Iron Age settlement, probably inhabited in the second century B.C. In this case, the relationship appears fortuitous rather than deliberate and meaningful, as the settlement was long-gone and most likely invisible when the boat-graves were constructed.

The impression is instead of a highly-planned linear cemetery, aspiring to create its own new ancestors rather than to reference the monuments of earlier ages. Indeed, no other boat-grave cemetery in Sweden has such a strictly linear arrangement, an examination of cemeteries in the region as well as the plans of published sites elsewhere in southern and central Sweden finds few parallels to Skamby in terms of its spatial organisation and defined character (e.g. Svanberg 2003, 155–335). Partly this may be illusory, as further burials appear to have been ploughed away at the foot of the ridge, but the fact remains that the boat-graves themselves were all placed on top of the ridge without adjoining graves on the ridge-sides. This indicates an exclusive burial group and a continuity of purpose. The boat-graves and their attendant circular stone-settings were possibly constructed over many generations, almost certainly for decades and perhaps for centuries. If so, then Skamby's location was part of a newly-created 'tradition' that invented the impression of a long genealogy within a relatively short time. Rather than referencing ancient monuments, the Skamby boat-graves were linked to the material vestiges of the past only by virtue of being encircled at a landscape-scale distance by ancient burial sites and fortifications.

A further quality of this location is that the ridge is distinctively boat-shaped towards its north-west end. This can be seen on maps and aerial photographs but would also have been fully visible to those approaching the site and upon the ridge (Figures 2 and 9). This ridge-shape is far from unique in the glacier-scarred landscape of the Vikbolandet peninsula, but in the immediate context the ridge appears to share this shape with only the two neighbouring ridges to the cemetery's east. Linked to its shape, the north-west–south-east alignment of the ridge may also be significant, for this allowed the boat-graves to adopt a south-west–north-east alignment perpendicular to the ridge. This is a widely recognised auspicious orientation for Viking period graves, including many of the boat-grave cemeteries of Uppland (G. Larsson 2007, 275). One suggestion for this preference for alignment is a Norse perception that the cardinal points were arranged at 45° to those used today (Lindstrom 1997, 117). If this applied to Skamby, the boats would be orientated north–south in Viking period terms. While our knowledge of pre-Christian eschatology is notoriously sketchy (e.g. Ellis 1943, 65–98), ideas of an afterlife journey to the north, and into mountains, seem commonplace. We might speculate that the orientation of the ridge facilitated mortuary performances, alluding to the presence of a home for the dead towards the north, perhaps among the hills of the spine of the Vikbolandet peninsula immediately north of the cemetery. In other words, whether a funerary metaphor or a belief in a concrete afterlife existence, the ridge may have been appropriate because it facilitated the eschatological theme of those interred in boat-graves as embarking on a journey

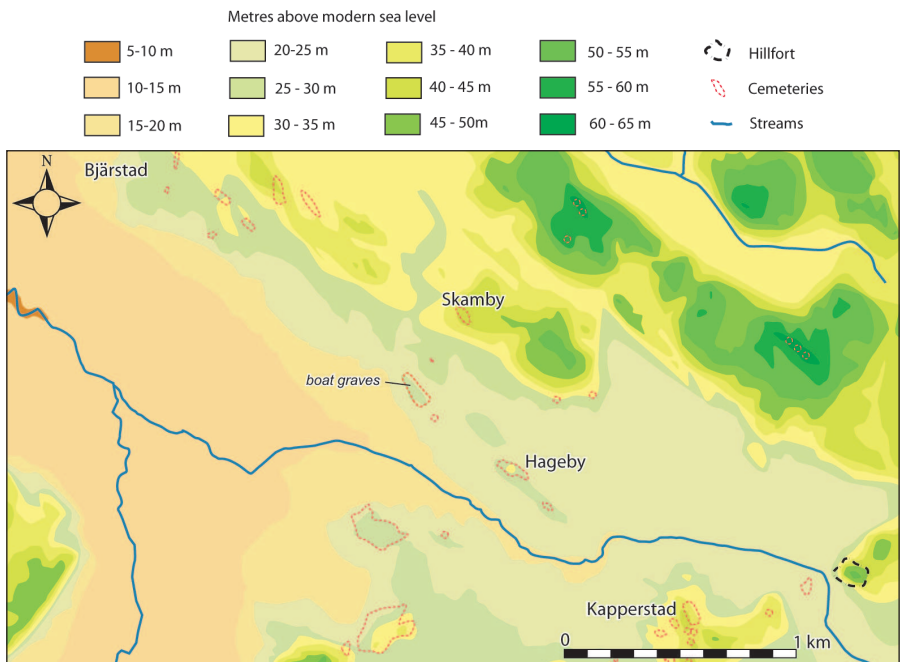


FIGURE 8. Map of the immediate topographical situation of the Skamby cemetery showing nearby cemeteries and hillforts.



FIGURE 9. Aerial photograph of the Skamby cemetery from NNW. Photograph by Jan Norrman, 14 August 1991, printed with the permission of the Swedish National Heritage Board.

FIGURE 10. Diagram plotting the distance and height above the nearest water of the principal cemeteries in the catchment area of the Gisselöån stream and its tributaries. The Skamby cemetery is denoted by a circle. It is among the most low-lying cemeteries and among the closest to water.

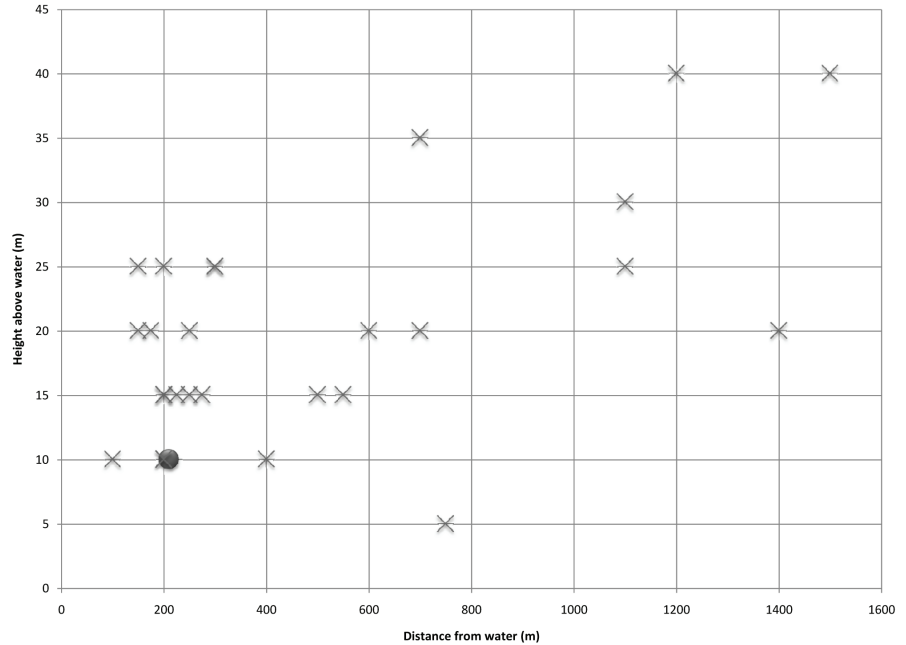


FIGURE 11. Photograph of the Skamby cemetery from the NW by Howard Williams, August 2005.

after death. Now this orientation is shared by other ridges and indeed, the overall orientation of the landscape, but it remains possible that the combination of shape and orientation afforded this location with auspicious qualities linked to ancestors, cosmology and mythology.

In summary, there are a range of distinctive landscape qualities to the Skamby cemetery that set it apart from other sites in the vicinity where it might have been placed instead. These qualities may have influenced the initial choice of location and accrued deepened significance with each new funeral. Indeed, they are striking enough to allow us to suggest that they were as important as the structures and materials employed in the boat-graves themselves in making the

cemetery an arena for the performance of an élite identity and perhaps also of their claimed history (see also Gansum and Østigård 2004, 76). It is possible that the site's combined qualities meant that it was perceived as a sacred or mythological space within the local environment and a place where the dead were perceived to 'live on' corporeally or metaphorically or where the journey to the next world was sanctioned to begin (see Ellis 1943, 90–96). Here, a maritime lifestyle was honoured at a point as far as it was possible to get from the sea by water on Vikbolandet, and where a genealogy of graves was constructed close to the homes of those interred (see also Williams 1999; 2006, 203–204).

Conclusion

Drawing all the evidence together, we argue that the commemorative significance of the Skamby boat-inhumation rite – unique for the region – can be explored through a combination of three scales of landscape context. To understand Skamby's location, we find that the traditional distribution map aids an appreciation in relation to coeval sites and monuments and the broader *longue durée* of ecology and settlement in the first millennium A.D. Regionally the site was set apart, not so much a part of the region of Östergötland as in a pocket of settlement at the edge of its fertile plains and close to the wooded, rocky eastern end of the Vikbolandet peninsula. In maritime terms, it was set in a cul-de-sac between the rivers and lakes of the interior and the inlets and islets of the Baltic Sea. Locally, the site was towards the north-east edge of a network of farms, each served by one or more large cemeteries that, together, shared a strategic position upon this entry-point into the interior of Östergötland. The élite group here may have had shifting and fluctuating loyalties and allegiances with others further inland and most likely cultivated contacts up and down Sweden's Baltic coast.

Yet this picture only takes us so far in an understanding of Skamby's location. In addition to the regional and local context, we have identified a number of distinctive qualities to the cemetery's precise place and immediate surroundings. The boat-graves were successively placed on a distinctive ridge as far as it was possible to get from the sea upon the Vikbolandet peninsula. In this environment, boat-inhumation may have signalled a maritime identity that may have included both raiding and trading. Yet the site was linked to the sea only by a circuitous route following a stream that was likely to have been used during the funeral to bring boats there. This was a land-locked context of farmland and encircling woods and hills. The ridge was distinctively boat-shaped and appears to have been a new burial location that was discrete from, but intervisible with, existing cemeteries on the valley-sides.

The combined qualities of place identified on all three scales of analysis made Skamby a distinctive place for a distinctive form of funerary practice. The location became invested with mythologies and memories through the placing of a prominent and distinctive sequence of mortuary monuments. Hence, the landscape was a pivotal medium in the practice of boat-inhumation, allowing

a local élite group to perform their identities and allegiances by distinctive and dynamic means.

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