

# Härskare i liv och död

## Social exklusivitet och maktstrategi i Vänerbygd under yngre järnålder

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Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i arkeologi vid Institutionen för historiska studier vid Göteborgs universitet som, med tillstånd av fakultetens dekanus, kommer att offentligt försvaras fredagen den 24 maj 2019, klockan 14.15 i sal 2150, Eklandagatan 86, Göteborg.



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

## Abstract

Nitenberg, Annelie. 2019. *Härskare i liv och död. Social exklusivitet och maktstrategi i Vånerbygd under yngre järnålder*. (Ruler in Life and Death. Social Exclusivity and Strategy for Power in Lake Vänern District in Late Iron Age). Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Written in Swedish, with an English summary. ISBN: 978-91-85245-77-1

Between 2000 and 2012, archaeological investigations were conducted in Sunnerby at Källandsö. A large mound from the Vendel period, an elite settlement from the late Iron Age/Medieval Times, as well as the remains of a medieval church are some of the contexts investigated. The results form the point of departure of this thesis in which the traces from Sunnerby are studied from a Micro archaeological perspective. Material from other Scandinavian sites is taken into account in a comparative analysis. Large mounds as well as elite settlements are in focus. The aim is to study strategies of the social elite in their quest to reach the required position in society, and their ability to achieve power in the Late Iron Age. Written sources are analysed to further broaden the level of knowledge. The thesis is a contribution to a methodological development concerning how things and texts can work together in a constructive way in the interpretative process of the past. Another important result of the thesis is that it opens up a fairly entrenched research area: Västergötland in the Late Iron Age. With new approaches from a relational perspective sprung from Posthumanist theories, new questions are formulated based on well-known material. Central conceptions are social practice, materiality, agency, actors (living and non-living) and physical phenomena.

In Kungshögen (*The King's mound*) there were a number of physical phenomena (a broken gold ring, a glass cup, gaming pieces and falconry concept) that can be linked to power strategies in the elite's ambitions for social and political positions. Together with the material from the adjacent settlement, it was concluded that the leaders of Sunnerby led an aristocratic life style with drinking ceremonies, gift exchange, exclusive hunting and gaming with board games. It was this aristocratic living that was in focus when the furnishing of the pyre and grave in Kungshögen was conducted. Different kinds of practices were also instruments of strategy in the socio-political tactics. Important practices/themes are: monumentalizing their own environment; falconry and exclusive hunting; eating, drinking and being merry; playing board games; burying leaders; taking objects out of circulation; storytelling; sacrificing in hall and mound; gift exchange; and belligerent activities. Monumentalizing and burying leaders stand out to be the most important strategies independent of time, place and source. The study also indicates that there is no general Scandinavian leadership to be found in the Iron Age; rather, variations over time and place with a differentiated leadership as well as a changing lordship ideology.

The analysed material also shows the importance of relations. In the Lake Vänern district there is an emphasis on family and kin, but different kinds of vertical relations are much less accentuated here than in other parts of Scandinavia. A few participated in violent activities and some were buried dressed as a warrior, but the warrior ideal and warfare have left relatively few traces here. The social elites of the Lake Vänern district did not actively wage war, but they were locally established, self-assertive and had the ability to keep themselves relatively self-contained. They were aware of their surrounding world and had good relations. They were part of a general North European culture sphere, the content of which was used in socio-political contexts. The social elites of the Lake Vänern district were eager to relate to the Merovingian kingdom, a condition accentuated in the material framework and the materialized lordship ideology.

*Keywords:* The Sunnerby investigation, archaeology, runic inscriptions, Beowulf, Ynglingatal, Late Iron Age, Västergötland, burials, large mounds, settlements, social and political elite, power, materiality, practice, Micro Archaeology, Posthumanist theories.