Ostlänken – Scientific Coordination

Göran Gruber[1], Magnus Johansson[2] & Tom Carlsson[3]

This notice accounts for the scientific coordination of the archaeological project "Ostländen". On 7 June 2018, the Swedish government granted the Swedish Transport Administration (*Sw.* Trafikverket) permission to build *Ostländen*, a new 160-kilometer double-track railway between Järna and Linköping in the southeast of Sweden (Regeringsbeslut 2018). The railway passes through three counties – Stockholm, Södermanland, and Östergötland – and five municipalities: Södertälje, Trosa, Nyköping, Norrköping, and Linköping (Figure 1). *Ostländen* is built to enable sustainable transport, increase passenger train capacity, reduce travel times, and contribute to regional expansion. The railway is planned to open in 2035, with an estimated cost of SEK 110.3 billion (price level 2025).

Approximately 700 archaeological sites are directly or indirectly affected by *Ostländen*. It is well established that large-scale linear projects, such as *Ostländen*, offer enormous scientific potential for archaeology as well as other disciplines, both at regional and national levels. Some early indications of this potential emerged during the initial archaeological investigations, called Step 2, which began in 2015 (Figures 2–4). Among other findings, a previously unknown Stone Age landscape was discovered along the Mesolithic archipelago between the cities of Norrköping and Linköping. Bäckeby, a site south of Norrköping, is one such cultural environment that

1 Trafikverket, Sweden
goran.gruber@trafikverket.se

2 Trafikverket, Sweden
magnus.r.johansson@trafikverket.se

3 Arkeologerna, SHM, Sweden
tom.carlsson@arkeologerna.com

Figure 1. The stretch of Ostlänken. Map: Trafikverket.

during the Early Stone Age was an island with multiple settlement locations (Sjölin & Westermark 2019).

Kardonbanan and Godsbangården in Norrköping are side systems to *Ostlänken*, and have already been completed. Extensive archaeological investigations were conducted in preparation for these two projects, including studies of the settlement at Ströja, which revealed Vendel Period hall buildings and finds of golden foil figures (so called "guldgubbar") (Arkeologikonsult). Additionally, the Late Iron Age cemetery at Bådstorp was investigated – one of the few fully excavated cemeteries from this period in the region (Seiler & Sjölin 2022).

System-critical?

Managing this large number of archaeological sites is a challenge. Against this background, the Swedish National Heritage Board (*Sw.* Riksantikvarieämbetet) analysed how the contract archaeology system might be affected by *Ostlänken* (RAÄ 2020). The report concludes that *Ostlänken's* scale risks creating time pressure and heavy workloads for archaeology officers at county boards, which may reduce decision quality and thus affect the scientific quality of investigations. The Board calls for coordina-

Figure 2. Mesolithic axe finds from the site at Bäckeby, between Norrköping and Linköping. Photo: Arkeologerna.

tion of the scientific issues. Without such coordination, there is a risk that the production of new knowledge about prehistory and history from *Ostlänken* may be limited. A weak influx of new knowledge in such a costly infrastructure project could lead to questioning the contract archaeology system in its current form (RAÄ 2020).

When it comes to the contract archaeology system's role in generating new relevant knowledge, a formal responsibility lies with the county administrative boards. At the same time, this responsibility concerns the entire archaeological sector.

Coordination

In the early 2020s, the county administrative boards of Östergötland and Södermanland produced regional knowledge bases for the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age (Hallgren & Molin 2020 ms; Eriksson 2023; Hållans et al. 2023). In 2021, the three affected county boards – Stockholm,

Fig. 9. Hallunda (Sites 13 and 69). Datable artifacts from the occupation debris. Natural size. 1, 69:400680; pottery sherd with a burnished surface, decoration stamped with a button. 2, 13:319561 (Find 517); bronze double button. 3, 69:440639 (Find 418); bronze double button. 4, 69:409646 (Find 124); bronze double button. 5, 69:414633 (Find 107); fragment of a clay mould for casting a bronze button (*Rapport* III, fig. 20:F107); 6, 69:448767 (Find 29); bronze razor. 7, 69:414630 (Find 232); bronze awl. 8, 69:377665 (Find 113); bronze pin.
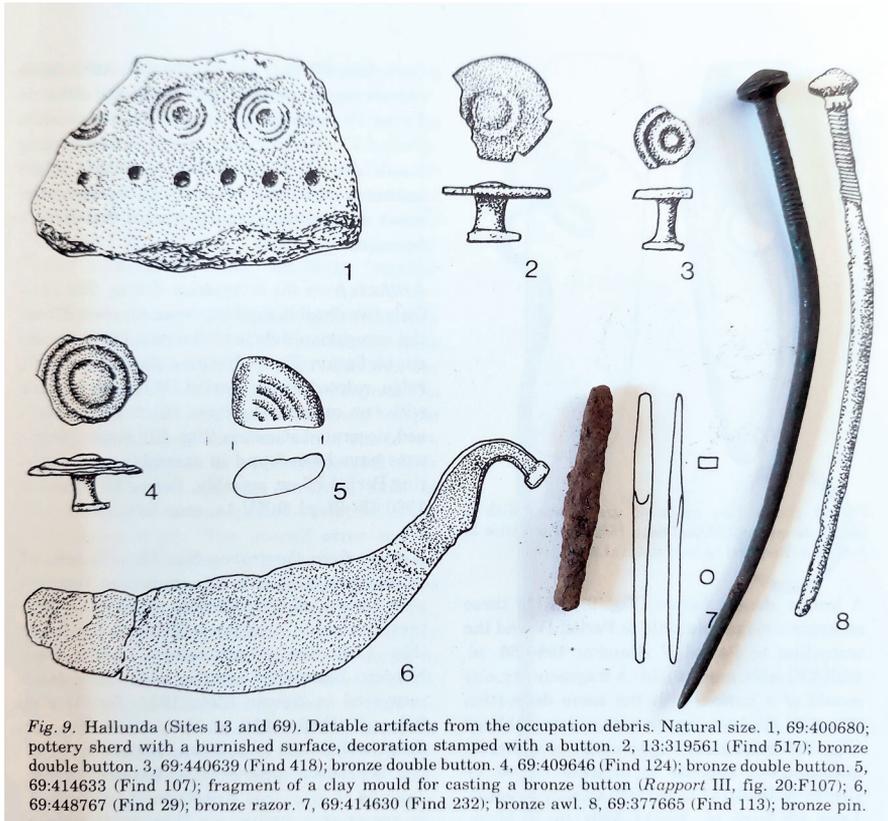
Figure 3. Finds from the settlement/burial ground at Rogsta, Nyköping. A similar bronze pin was found during an excavation in Hallunda, south of Stockholm. Photo: Trafikverket.

Södermanland, and Östergötland – jointly decided that *Ostlänken* should be treated as one project rather than three separate county projects. This decision enables cross-county decision-making according to the Swedish Cultural Heritage Act (KML). In 2022, the county administrative boards jointly decided that a scientific coordinator was needed for the archaeology along the *Ostlänken* project. Initially, Dr. Fredrik Andersson compiled a report (2023) on behalf of the county boards, which called for concrete, cohesive, and realistically feasible archaeological themes, including related research questions as well as methodological and analytical choices.

Based on Andersson's report, which argued that scientific themes provide a viable path to good and sustainable science, a scientific coordinator was appointed on January 1, 2025. The work of this coordinator initially runs for one year and is funded by Trafikverket. The project includes a full-time coordination position and funding for meetings of five different forum groups. These groups are primarily divided chronologically: Stone

Figure 4. Preliminary archaeological investigation of burial mounds at Bönsta outside Nyköping. Photo: Trafikverket.

Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Historical Period. There is also a documentation forum group that develops proposals aimed at making documentation more consistent across archaeological actors.

The choice to work with forum groups, whose participants include archaeologists from both contract archaeology and universities, allows some 40 researchers to participate in shaping the direction of the scientific work. This creates both breadth and depth in the scientific questions addressed. In brief, the various themes developed will be used by county board officers when drafting requests for proposals for upcoming investigations and procurements, by archaeological firms in designing investigation plans, in reports, and in future in-depth studies. Naturally, this approach also contains flexibility to accommodate unexpected results as well as the individual investigator's creativity in formulating new questions that can lead to good and sustainable knowledge.

Abbreviations

RAÄ = Riksantikvarieämbetet; Swedish National Heritage Board
SHMM = Statens Historiska Museer; National Historical Museums

References

Andersson, F. 2023. *Underlag till vetenskapligt program. Inför arkeologiska undersökningar längs Ostlänken.* Rapport 2023:5. Nyköping: Länsstyrelsen i Södermanlands län.

Arkeologikonsult. n.d. *Sensationella arkeologiska fynd av en centralplats i Ströja i Östergötland Ströja.* https://www.arkeologikonsult.se/aktuella-projekt/stroeja. Checked 2025-12-04.

Eriksson, T. 2023. *Kunskapsunderlag för bronsålder i sydöstra Södermanland.* Rapport 2023:1. Nyköping: Länsstyrelsen Södermanlands län.

Hållans, A-M, Peterson, M. & Seiler, A. 2023. *Kunskapsunderlag Ostlänken. Järnåldersboplatser i åkermark och järnåldersgravfält.* Rapport 2023:19. Nyköping: Länsstyrelsen i Södermanlands län.

Seiler, A. & Sjöling, M. 2022. *Gravar och gårdsmiljöer vid Bådstorp.* Arkeologisk undersökning Rapport 2022:3. Stockholm: Arkeologerna, SHMM.

Sjölin, M. & Westermark, A. 2019. Ostlänken delsträckorna Bäckeby till Fredrikslund och Fredrikslund till Göta kanal. Arkeologisk utredning, etapp 2. Rapport 2019:18. Stockholm: Arkeologerna, SHMM.

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

Hallgren, F. & Molin, F. Ms. 2020. *Kunskapsunderlag om Mesolitikum i Östergötlands län.* Länsstyrelsen Östergötland.

RAÄ 2020. PM. *Hur kan det uppdragsarkeologiska systemet påverkas av Ostlänken?* Case number RAÄ-2020-843.

Regeringsbeslut [Decision of the Swedish Government]. 2018. Miljö- och energidepartementet. Case number: M2015/03829/Me.