

Flying Daggers, Horse Whisperers and a Midwinter Sacrifice

Creating the Past during the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages

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This paper sets out to trace the life history of a horse skull found in a bog in Scania in the year 1900. A parallel is drawn between the find of the horse and the famous painting, “Midwinter Sacrifice” by Carl Larsson. The story of the horse has opened up a discussion on how material culture is created and recreated in time and space, resulting in completely new communicative fields. The manifestation of the past and the reuse of Stone Age places and artefacts are brought into focus when the author discusses the location where the horse skull was originally found.

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OUTSET

In the autumn of the year 1900 a strange object was recovered from the bank of the Ullstorp creek, which flows between the parishes of Ullstorp and Kverrestad in Scania. The finder was a man named J.A. Sjögren (Fig. 1), and the object consisted of the forepart of a horse skull. Protruding from the skull, in the middle of the forehead, was a fragmented Late Neolithic flint dagger (Fig. 2). By tracing the horse skull’s different historically situated roles, several parallel stories evolve. One story sheds light on why a horse in late Viking Age Scania was killed by means of a Stone Age flint dagger and then placed in a bog. The Ullstorp skull also contains a story of how large collections of archaeological artefacts and natural-history specimens together with mere curios were created in schools and museums in the late 19th and early 20th centuries all over Europe (Ett resande vaxkabinett 1999:7ff; Palmberg Eriksson 2000:5; Henare 2005:153f; Kristenson 2005:77, 84).

The varying roles of the horse from Ullstorp therefore tell us something essential about how the relationship between people and material culture is constantly renegotiated in time and space.

Fig. 1. The horse from Ullstorp. The main entrance of Österport College is visible in the background. Photo by the author, 2005.

WHAT GOES UP...

The first mention of the find of the horse skull is from a brief notice in one of the local newspapers in Lund (*Lunds Dagblad*) on the 15th of November 1900. In the same year, or possibly the next, the horse skull was either donated or exchanged to the college of Ystad (*Ystads högre allmänna läroverk*), which had its own museum collection (*läroverksmuseum*) known as Ystad's museum (*Ystads museum*). The museum collection at the college of Ystad was founded as early as 1864 in order to serve the college's growing need for educational material, and originally it consisted mainly of stuffed mammals and birds (Löwegren 1974a:39ff). The



same year a new headmaster, Nils Gustaf Bruzelius, was appointed to the college. Bruzelius had a great interest in both natural history and archaeology. Before being appointed headmaster in Ystad, he worked at the coin cabinet and museum of antiquity in Lund. He was also a senior lecturer in Nordic archaeology ("Nils Gustaf Bruzelius", *Svenskt biografiskt handlexikon*). During the time Bruzelius was appointed headmaster, the museum collection grew significantly, and not only natural-history objects were collected but also human skeletons and archaeological artefacts. By publishing the names of the persons who donated material to the museum, he managed to increase the number of donations. He also convinced the Ystad Savings Bank to fund the museum continuously. One of Bruzelius' first undertakings was to initiate an acquisitions catalogue of the museum collection. The horse skull is mentioned in the acquisitions catalogue of the archaeological collection 1900-1901 as LM 3171, "1 horse cranium, which the headmaster received in exchange from the finder Mr. J.A. Sjögren and donated to the museum" (*1 Hästkranium, af rektor sig tillbytt af Upphittaren Herr J.A. Sjögren och till museum öfverlåtet*) (Bruzelius 1870, 1871, 1884-85; Wahlgren 1872; Carlsson 1928; Löwegren 1974a: 39-45; Gunnar Wieslander, 2005-04-26; Ingela Bergils, 2005-09-26).

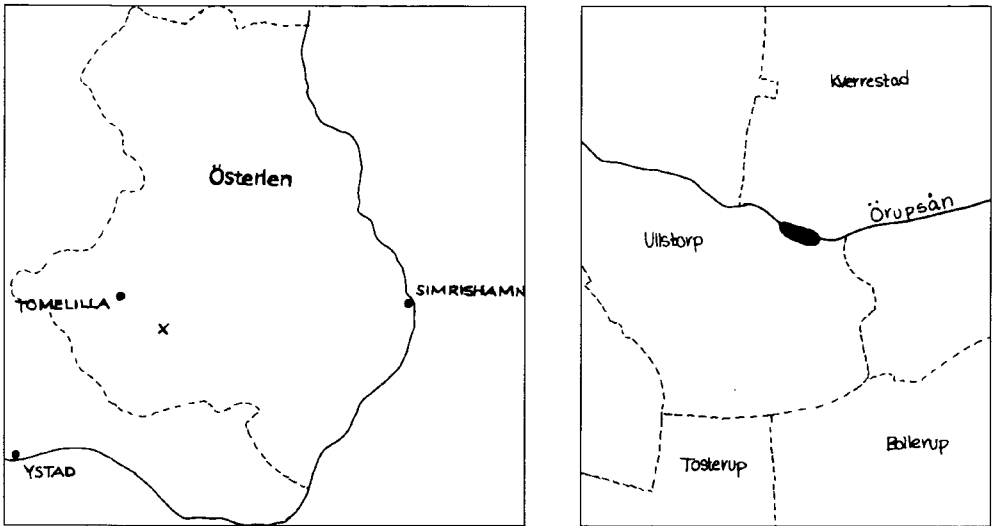


Fig. 2. When comparing the different descriptions of where the horse skull was found, I have drawn the conclusion that the most likely location is by the Ullstorp creek (today known as Örupsån), as marked on the map. The creek marks the boundary between the parishes of Ullstorp and Kverrestad, and therefore it is hard to tell in which parish the horse skull was originally found. The map shows the estimated location of where the horse skull was found (marked in black), as well as the boundaries between the parishes of Ullstorp, Kverrestad, Bollerup and Tosterup. Map by the author.

The college of Ystad has a long history. From the 16th century to the beginning of the 19th century, the school was housed in the old Laurenti monastery near St. Maria church (*S:ta Maria kyrka*). The school then moved to premises near the quay of Ystad (*Hamngatan*). Due to the growing number of students, the college was moved to Österport Square in 1872, to the property of Consul R. Lundgren (*Lundgrenska palatset*), later known as the new city hall (*nya rådhuset*). When the college moved to new premises, the museum collection also acquired more space and a large part of the collection was exhibited. The museum of Ystad now hosted a collection consisting of more than 3000 items. At that time the museum of Ystad had, for example, a very fine collection of subfossil animals. When Bruzelius retired in 1891 the botanist Leopold Martin Neuman succeeded him. In the beginning of the 20th century close to 8000 items formed part of the collection, which is why a large part of the items had to be stored instead of exhibited. The college had again outgrown its old premises, and by 1914 the college had moved to the building where it is located today, in Österport Square in Ystad (Fig. 3). Even though rooms for the museum had been specially reserved in the new building, they were never used for that purpose. Instead the collection remained at the college's old premises (Bruzelius 1870, 1871, 1884-85; Löwegren 1974a:40, 44-48; Ronnie Liljegren, 2005-04-02).

The Grey Friars monastery of Ystad was at the time partly used as a library and a museum of cultural history where the prehistoric society of Ystad (*Ystads*

Fig. 3. The college of Ystad in Österport Square. Photo by the author, 2005.



fornminnesförening), founded in 1907, exhibited their collection of both archaeology and cultural history. It was decided that the archaeological part of the college's collection should be transferred to the monastery and made part of the collection there, and this was done in 1919 (Minnesskrift 1917; Minnesskrift 1932). The college's natural-history collection was, however, never part of the society's collection and it remained in the old school building for a few years until it was moved to the college's present premises. A large room and corridor on the third floor of the college were fitted out with exhibition cases of glass and Ystad's museum soon opened to the public, which was a great success. It seems that the horse skull was kept as part of the museum's collection of natural history even if it is mentioned in the acquisitions catalogue of the archaeological collection. It might be that the horse skull, after it was catalogued in 1900-1901, was thought of as a natural-history object rather than an archaeological object (Löwegren 1974a:48f; Ingela Bergils, 2005-09-26). The horse skull was at any rate part of the museum exhibition at the college of Ystad as it took shape in the 1920s, and was considered the pride of the entire museum. When a new curriculum for colleges in Sweden was introduced in 1966, some of the exhibition area was turned into educational space. The major part of the museum was still intact, however, and the horse skull was still exhibited in the largest of the rooms, in a glass exhibition case below the large windows and alongside parts of the college's fine collection of subfossil animals (Löwegren 1974a:50f, 1974b).

The museum remained relatively unchanged until 1973. In that year, on the 24th of January, an article in one of the newspapers in Ystad (*Ystads allehanda*) announced the following: "Unique school museum in Ystad will be scattered.

onsdagen den 24 januari 1973

Unikt skolmuseum i Ystad splittras Uppstoppade djur auktioneras bort

Österportskolans märkliga samling djur skall skingras. I samlingen finns bl a den finaste uppsättning svenska fåglar någon skola i landet äger. Uppförandet av en ny skolbyggnad och restauration av den gamla har emellertid med-

fört att det inte finns plats över för samlingen. Den kommer att splittras, även om skolan gör sitt bästa för att hålla åtminstone fågelsamlingen intakt. Vad som händer med samlingen av däggdjur är ovisst.

Fig. 4. The headline and introduction of the article from *Ystads Allehanda* 1973-01-24.

Stuffed animals are to be auctioned off” (Fig. 4). Increasing numbers of students had again forced the museum to further diminish the exhibition area. This time the major part of the collection was actually sold off, and left at the college were only a few of the subfossil animals as well as its very large and almost complete collection of Swedish birds still on display in a corridor (Löwegren 1974a:50f).

...MUST COME DOWN

Information on the horse skull's whereabouts after 1973 is somewhat vague. There are no records of how long the skull was on display at the school, or even if it was actually still there. It is simply my assumption that the horse skull, being the museum's pride, was one of the objects they decided to keep at the school after 1973. As the skull still resides at the school, today known as Österport College, it is also most likely that it remained there all along.

But even if the horse from Ullstorp, after it was found in 1900, was kept in a small town like Ystad as part of a museum collection, its mere existence inspired a variety of researchers all over the world. It was lent to different institutions in Sweden and other parts of Europe (ATA d. nr. 1522/31; Ronnie Liljegren 2005-04-02). The skull with its flint dagger recovered from the Ullstorp creek was during the 20th century primarily discussed in terms of its being one of the oldest known horses in Scandinavia at the time, and not seldom as evidence of some sort of racial ancestry. The horse was also discussed in terms of a ritual sacrifice from the Neolithic. Another subject raised was the natural history of the bog where the skull was found (Andersson 1901; Palleske 1901; Munch 1902:221-224; Nordman 1905:104; Schnittger 1910:44; Reinhardt 1912:200; Kurek 1926: 18; Lidén 1926:20; Christoffersson 1936:84; Hermes 1936:803-823; Arbman & Arvidsson 1940:30; Schmidt 1946:124; Lundholm 1947:187f; Brøndsted 1966: 312; Liljegren 1975:105).

In the 1970s, thanks to developments in methods of natural science, the horse skull was radiocarbon dated as part of a project at the University of Lund – a search for Sweden's oldest cow and horse. The dating of the horse skull yielded a somewhat surprising result, namely 1060 +/-70 BP (Elisabeth Iregren, 2005-04-19; Ronnie Liljegren, 2005-04-26). The first radiocarbon dating of the horse skull could also be said to mark a shift of interest in the horse. I have, for example, been unable to recover any scientific references to the horse after its last mention in 1974, aside from those already mentioned above. The horse skull was presumably returned to its storage place at Österport College in Ystad after the dating in Lund. At some time after 1974 it is likely that the skull was removed from its glass exhibition case and degraded to a more humble storage place at the school. There are recollections of the skull still in its glass case in the hallway when the latter was used as a storage space for clothes and jackets, and it was later put on display in the teacher's lounge and finally stored in the school's basement (Ronnie Liljegren, 2005-10-30).

When visiting the school today one is unable to comprehend the magnitude of the exhibition of the museum of Ystad, as it must have been like in its heyday. The subfossil animals that remained at the school after 1973 were in the following years treated in a haphazard way, resulting in the final destruction of a once excellent collection of subfossil animals. Today, a subfossil stag still on display in one of the stairwells is the most visible sign of the famous collection. On my first visit to the school (2005-04-25) the horse skull was kept, wrapped only in two sheets of paper, on the bottom shelf in a small office storage room. On my second visit (2005-10-19), the horse skull had been moved to a cardboard box marked “The horse skull” (*hästskallen*) (Fig. 5).

The horse from Ullstorp made one rather interesting comeback, however, only a few years ago. The Nordic Museum (*Nordiska museet*) in Stockholm borrowed the horse skull from the school for an exhibition on horses: “The horse – bridled, whipped, loved” (*Hästen – tyglad, piskad, älskad*). The skull was on display at the museum from the 7th of May 2003 to the 5th of September 2004. It was exhibited with a note on its origin and dating: “...1800-1500 BC”. After receiving comments on the faulty dating and questions on whether the museum was aware of the results from the earlier radiocarbon dating of the skull, the Nordic Museum decided to perform yet another radiocarbon dating before letting the horse remain as part of the exhibition (Jeanette Varberg, 2005-04-26). The dating was performed in May 2004 at the Ångström Laboratory in Uppsala. When I spoke to a curator at the museum in order to find out more about the second dating of the horse skull, she described somewhat upset the proceedings of the skull as an “April fools joke”. It turns out the second radiocarbon analysis of the skull yielded a date to c. 1075 (Birgitta Skarke, 2005-04-01), which only strengthens the earlier dating as also being accurate. I am not certain, though, whether the horse after the dating was put back into the exhibition at the Nordic Museum, or if it was returned to the school because it no longer met the museum’s expectations. When Ronnie

Liljegren (partly responsible for the first radiocarbon dating of the horse) found out about the horse’s escapades in Stockholm, he was somewhat surprised to hear about the second dating, as they made sure to attach a note to the horse with the results from the first dating when returning the skull to the school (Ronnie Liljegren, 2005-04-02). But keeping the horse’s present



Fig. 5. The Ullstorp horse skull’s present location, at Österport College. Photo by the author, 2005.

storage facilities at the school in mind, I imagine a piece of paper could easily have been lost.

THE HORSE FROM ULLSTORP – FAKE OR RITUAL SACRIFICE?

Another explanation for the disinterest following the first dating of the horse skull is that many archaeologists believed the find to be a falsification, that the horse skull was actually fabricated some time during the 19th or 20th century.

In the first article documenting the find of the horse there is mention of the absence of fracturing surrounding the entry hole of the dagger and how this in turn might be interpreted as proof of the find's authenticity (Andersson 1901:81-82). After I documented the horse skull when visiting the college in Ystad, Jan Storå, the research assistant at the Osteoarchaeological Research Laboratory at the Department of Archaeology, Stockholm University, kindly offered to look at the photographs of the horse. The complete absence of fine fractures and cracks in the bone around the entry hole indicated indeed that the horse was probably still alive or, at the very least, just recently dead when the dagger was thrust in its forehead (Jan Storå, 2005-04-12, April-June 2005).

The dagger was wedged right between the sutures of the forehead (*sutura coronalis*) and the wound must have been instantly lethal. The dagger is fragmented at the broadest part of the blade, perhaps at the time it was used. When the horse skull was first found, it was noted that the patina of the flint dagger was the same on the surface of the dagger as on the area of fracture (Andersson 1901). The flint dagger seems to be a lancet-shaped dagger, possibly Montelius type II. The part of the dagger that was driven into the horse's skull is actually not the blade, but the handle of the dagger. The dagger could have been already broken when it was used. Alternatively, having lost the knowledge of how to use a flint dagger, the person who thrust it into the skull may have turned it the other way around.

Therefore it is most likely that the horse was killed by a Late Neolithic flint dagger some time in the transition between the Viking Age (800-1100) and the Early Middle Ages (1100-1200).

A MIDWINTER SACRIFICE

Let's linger a moment and compare the fate of the horse from Ullstorp with the fate of another multivocal artefact in history – namely Carl Larsson's (1853-1919) painting "Midwinter Sacrifice" (Gunnarsson 1992b:27-60). Comparing the two phenomena helps to broaden the discussion and tells us something about how material culture can be reconstructed and recreated, resulting in completely new communicative fields in both prehistory and today.

The prodigious painting, Carl Larsson's last monumental work, was intended as part of a series of frescos for the east wall in the upper hall of the National Museum in Stockholm (Isaksson *et al.* 1983). At the time the museum hosted collections and exhibitions of the Historical Museum. The painting depicts how the king Domalde is sacrificed at the temple of Uppsala in the hope of bringing

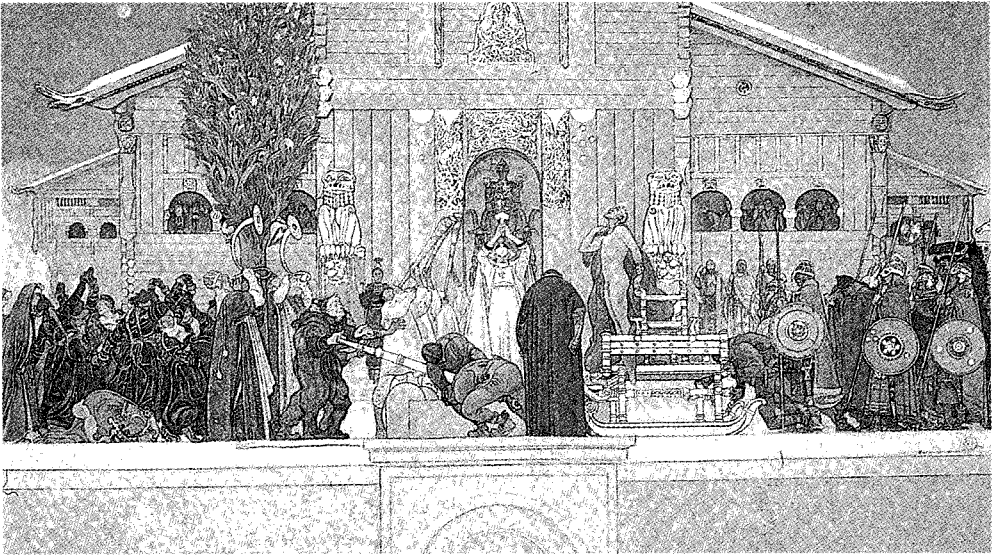


Fig. 6. "Midwinter Sacrifice", by Carl Larsson, 1915. The fourth sketch (Gunnarsson 1992b:225).

greater future harvests and general well being to his people. The king is standing naked on the sleigh, preparing to die. A priest wearing a shiny red cape is holding a knife behind his back, visible to the onlookers but not to the people taking part in the scene. The knife held by the priest is a Bronze Age dagger (Isaksson *et al.* 1983:33-60) (figs. 6, 7).

The painting was never accepted; instead the museum's board of directors rejected it in the year 1916. There was a great deal of criticism and debate in both the press and in the political and cultural spheres at the time. Carl Larsson received a great deal of criticism especially from archaeologists. His lack of authenticity and anachronistic use of the material culture in "Midwinter Sacrifice" horrified the scholars. In the painting, objects, clothing and other features originating from the Bronze Age to historic times are depicted in one and the same scene (Isaksson *et al.* 1983:61-95).

Why did Carl Larsson persevere in his choice of motif and the way it was portrayed? He was well acquainted with the archaeologists Oscar Montelius and Bernhard Salin and with archaeological finds and artefacts of the time, but the autodidact Carl Larsson had problems coming to terms with how material culture was treated and interpreted in archaeological research. He felt more at home with writers such as Viktor Rydberg and August Strindberg (Isaksson *et al.* 1983:61-94). He nourished a dream of capturing the magic of the mythological Vendel Period (550-800) in a painting, a period which especially interested him. The king Domalde was also probably a self-portrait, where Carl Larsson identified with the naked king about to give his life to the people. The solitude of the king alludes to the isolation Carl Larsson felt in relation to the Swedish art establishment (Lundström 1980:10; Lagercrantz 1993; Welinder 1999).

Fig. 7. Detail from "Midwinter Sacrifice", showing the priest holding the knife (Isaksson et al. 1983:49).



A new debate began when the painting was exhibited at the Historical Museum 1983-84. It was then offered to the National Museum through a Swedish art dealer. The museum board declined, referring to the fact that the mythological motif was connected to the collections and exhibitions of the Historical Museum, placed at the National Museum at the time when the painting was finished. The painting was instead sold to a person who offered it to the Historical Museum for 12 million Swedish crowns. Again there was a great bustle in the press as to whether the painting should be returned to its original location in the National Museum, or be put on display in the Historical Museum. The painting was described as both an unsurpassed masterwork of Swedish art and as an artistically and morally suspicious product. Again a heated debate regarding the many archaeological, chronological mix-ups and mistakes of the painting took place in newspapers. Eventually, in 1987, the painting was sold by the auction company Sotheby's, in London, to a Japanese businessman. In 1992 the painting finally returned to Sweden and the National Museum, in connection with the Carl Larsson exhibition the same year. With the help of very generous private donors, the painting was finally bought from Japan by the National Museum in 1997. "Midwinter Sacrifice" today thus hangs where Carl Larsson intended it to hang (Isaksson *et al.* 1983:33-60; Gunnarsson 1992a:193-227).

The fate of the painting and in a sense Carl Larsson's own life are in many ways similar to that of the horse from Ullstorp. Carl Larsson and the horse from Ullstorp resided in the same societal sphere, a society where scientific and industrial changes diminished distances between people at the same time as these very changes made the world expand. The political situation in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was apprehensive and agitated. Science, especially natural science, was put to nationalistic and patriotic uses and the quest for normality and perfectionism became more and more important (Isaksson *et al.* 1983:29-60; Nordin 2005:10-13).

In his memoirs “I” (*Jag*) Carl Larsson wrote: “The fate of Midwinter Sacrifice broke me.” What the painting expressed, and what Carl Larsson believed in when painting it, was an ideal vision and his right to conceptualise the past by modifying and renegotiating materiality. But he also believed the reuse of material culture, as expressed in the painting, might have been a true image of the past (Isaksson *et al.* 1983:60). The surrounding society failed to see this. The painting was not what the societal establishment of the time wanted, with its lack of scientific accuracy and naturalism. The painting was accused of depicting a scene from a fairy tale, that it was too theatrical and superficial, that it was artificial and naive (Isaksson *et al.* 1983:33-48; Lagercrantz 1993).

In the beginning of the 20th century the horse from Ullstorp was used to establish and confirm interpretations that focused mainly on origin and contact. It was the museum’s finest object because it was primarily perceived as an object of natural history. The dating of the horse in the 1970s led to its degradation, physically demonstrated by its gradual repositioning from the exhibition to the basement and finally to its present location in a box. The reuse of material culture that the horse expressed did not lead to the posing of different questions by the scientists, but instead to total disinterest. It was not until knowledge of the dating was temporarily lost that the horse once again attracted scientific interest. But when another dating merely confirmed the previous one, the horse again fell out of favour and was presumably removed from the exhibition at the Nordic Museum.

The anachronistic qualities of the horse from Ullstorp and the painting “Midwinter Sacrifice” have in similar ways and for similar reasons caused turmoil, havoc and indifference in their respective life-worlds. They both came to be undesirable in their own time for the mere reason that they failed to live up to the specific expectations of the surrounding world.

RETURNING TO ULLSTORP

Due to its unique character and background, the horse from Ullstorp has never been properly discussed in terms of the context in which it was actually deposited. The horse skull was found at a time when the Ullstorp creek was being subjected to regulation; the skull was lying in mud and gravel dug up from the creek. There is also mention of other finds from the same location as the horse skull, namely two human craniums and a deer antler. In addition there was a somewhat vague description of “Iron Age finds” in the bog (Löwegren 1974a.83f).

The Ullstorp creek, today known only as Örup Creek (*Örupsån*), flows through a deep valley. In old records of Ullstorp parish two farmsteads are mentioned, Toarp and Ullstorp (Skånes kalender), situated on either side of the creek. The oldest written evidence of the farmstead of Toarp is from the year 1500 (RAÄ Ullstorp 26), and the earliest for the farmstead of Ullstorp is from the year 1435 (RAÄ Ullstorp 25). Ullstorp Church dates as far back as to the 12th century (“Ullstorps kyrka”, Svenska kyrkan). There are also three more possible farmstead locations in the area that have medieval records: RAÄ Tosterup 43 (1374) in

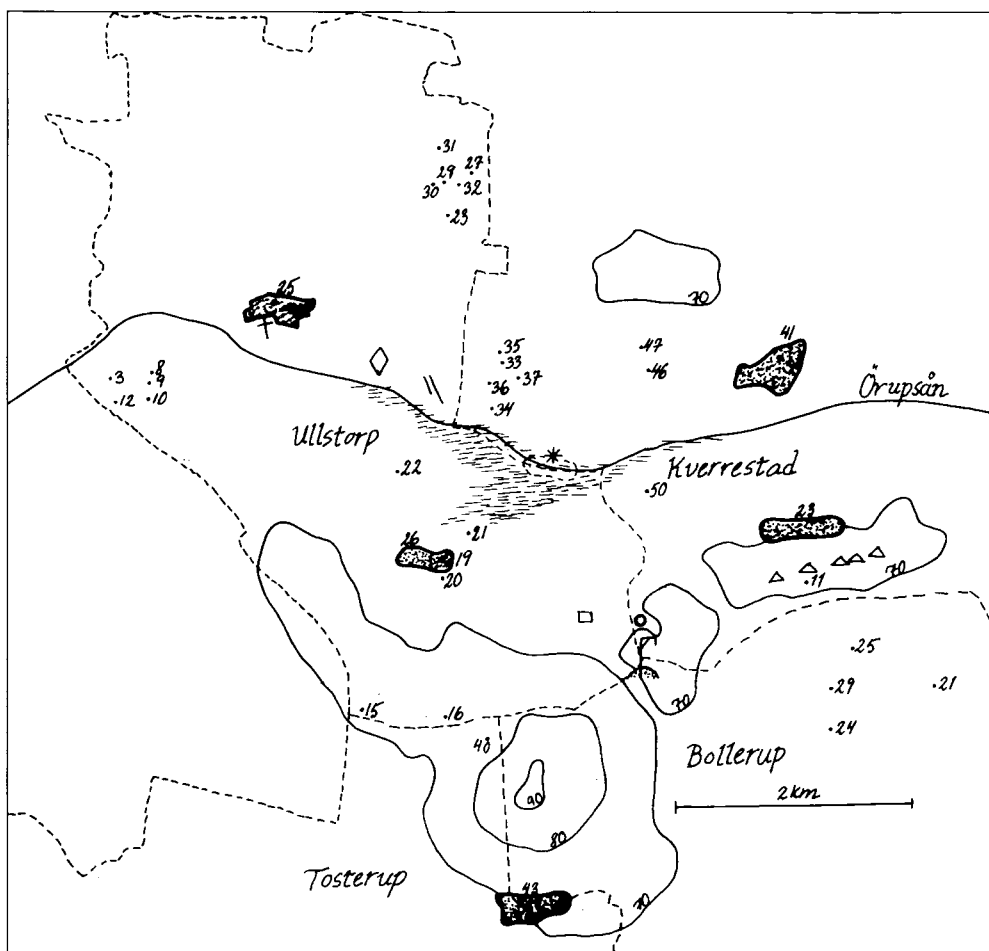


Fig. 8. Map of the immediate surroundings of the Ullstorp creek. Map by the author, 2005.

The hatched area marks the supposed location of Toarp bog.

The encircled and dotted areas mark the location of the medieval farmsteads.

The location of Ullstorp Church is marked with a cross.

The presumed location of the horse skull is marked with an asterisk.

The location of the gallows is marked with a gallows symbol.

The location of the mill is marked with a circle.

The location of the thing is marked with a square.

The locations of the tumulus graves are marked with rectangles.

The location of the medieval road system is indicated by two parallel track marks.

The location of the medieval house foundation (RAÄ Ullstorp 6:1-2) is marked with a diamond shape.

The locations of the Stone Age features are all marked with a dot together with the RAÄ number.

Tosterup parish, and RAÄ Kverrestad 23 (1460) and RAÄ Kverrestad 41 (1369) in Kverrestad parish. The place-names and the late dating of the farmsteads Toarp and Ullstorp suggest that the farms were relocated and originally part of a larger farmstead (Ingers 1968:7) (Fig. 8).

In some cases, the find-spot of the horse skull is referred to as Toarp, or the Toarp bog (Löwegren 1974a:50; Karsten 1994:330). Toarp in the parish of Ullstorp is also the closest farmstead to the skull's find-spot. The existence of a peat bog is situated somewhere between the farmstead of Toarp and the Ullstorp creek is also likely, even though there is no bog today but only some marshy spots (Skånska rekognosceringskartan 1986: kartblad VIÖ 207). In the oldest known topographic description of the parishes in the county of Kristianstad, the use of peat (as fuel) from the area surrounding the creek is mentioned (Wallin 1981:140). A place-name in the immediate surroundings of the find-spot and the farmstead of Toarp also indicates the existence of a bog: *pisshåorna, mosskifte*. The area between Toarp and the creek is described as sandy in parts, *Toarps sandar, sandmark*, and in other parts overgrown with hazel shrubs. The hazel was probably grown as coppice ("Ullstorp", SOFI; Wallin 1981:140) (Fig. 8).

One and a half kilometres southeast of the farmstead of Toarp there is evidence of a gallows or place of execution according to a land survey map from the year 1780. The gallows, called Galgabacken, is situated on a small gravel ridge and was the official place of execution in the jurisdictional district of Ingelstad (RAÄ Ullstorp 33). The gallows of Ullstorp can be traced back to medieval times (Wallin 1967:74). Interestingly the gallows is located almost on the spot where the borders of the parishes Ullstorp, Kverrestad and Bollerup meet (Wallin 1967; Månsson & Åkesson 1996). The gravel ridge was probably originally part of the larger gravel ridge just to the south. The areas surrounding the gallows are called Galgaåkre and Galgebacksåkrarne. In the surroundings of the gallows there is a mill, Galgamöllan, and a thing (*ting*) (RAÄ Ullstorp 18) ("Ullstorp", Österlens släkt- och folklivsforskarförening; SOFI; Wallin 1967:71). Just southeast of the farmstead of Ullstorp there is also an area with remains of a hollow track system, forming two parallel tracks (RAÄ Ullstorp 35:1), and a rectangular house foundation which is partly excavated and interpreted as possibly medieval (RAÄ Ullstorp 6:1-2). The parish is also rich in Neolithic remains: graves (RAÄ Ullstorp 3:1), deposits (RAÄ Ullstorp 8, 9, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 29, 30, RAÄ Kverrestad 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 46, 47, 50, RAÄ Tosterup 40) and settlements or activity areas (RAÄ Ullstorp 10, 12, 15, 16, 31, 32, RAÄ Kverrestad 11, 29, Bollerup 21, 24, 25, 29). Late Neolithic flint daggers have also been found at several locations (RAÄ Ullstorp 19, 22, RAÄ Tosterup 40, RAÄ Kverrestad 35, 36) (Fig. 8).

In the area a few tumulus graves occur. With some exceptions these are not indicated on the map (Fig. 8). In the parish of Kverrestad, not far from the Toarp bog, there are tumulus graves situated together along a small ridge. These are marked on the map (RAÄ Kverrestad 7, 10, 12:1-2, 13).

THE REUSE OF MATERIAL CULTURE

The manifestation of the past was a widespread tendency during the Scandinavian Viking Age and Early Middle Ages, with a documented reuse of artefacts, monuments and places that originated in ancient times (Burström 1996; Artelius

2004:100f). It has been suggested that reused objects were viewed as supernatural cult objects with magical or amuletic properties, in which case one was most likely not aware of, or interested in, their antiquity (Carelli 1997:398f, 402; Eckhardt & Williams 2003:156f). Stone Age artefacts are not uncommon finds in excavations of medieval occupation layers. These deposits have been interpreted as evidence of a thunderbolt tradition in medieval times, known from Europe, Asia and Africa. According to a popular myth with almost global distribution, a stone was hurled from heaven every time lightning struck. The artefacts, which are usually called thunderbolts, are mostly Stone Age tools, predominantly axes but also sickles and daggers. In Sweden the thunderbolt tradition is mainly associated with the god Thor and the thunderbolts are therefore called *torvigg* or *torkil* (Carelli 1997; Carlie 2004:145-160). Stone Age artefacts were also often used as ritual house offerings in both prehistoric and historic times (Karsten 1994:145ff; Carlie 2004; Bradley 2005). Perhaps the reason for the Stone Age edge tools (axes, sickles and daggers) in Iron Age ritual contexts is the role played by their stabbing and cutting properties. Edge tools have been used in historical times as they were thought to ward off evil (Hagberg 1930). Stone axes were thought to delimit forest fires if they were dragged around the area on fire, thus binding the fire (Kjellmark & Thordeman 1939:80).

The meaning of objects is dependent on context. Objects removed from one cultural context to another in space or in time lose connection with their proper use. But instead the detachment from their contemporary society equips them with a special role in defining society in relation to other times and places (Eckhardt & Williams 2003:142). The temporal life of objects has been widely addressed in recent years through, for example, the recognition of artefact biographies (Kopytoff 1986). The reuse of Stone Age features can be exemplified by the deposition of a coin cache in a gallery grave in Öjaby parish in the province of Småland, excavated by Knut Kjellmark in 1909. In the southern end of the grave a total of 385 medieval silver coins were found. The most recent coin in the hoard (TPQ) indicated an earliest date of deposition to the second half of the 13th century. Directly underneath the coins lay the neck of a shaft-hole axe. In the grave cist several objects of Late Neolithic origin were found. The axe and the coins had been carefully placed in a hole that had been dug in the stone filling of the gallery grave (Kjellmark & Thordeman 1939). There is a rich collection of myths and legends surrounding the deposition of metal caches. Buried treasures were visible by means of shining firelight at the place where they had been deposited. The treasures were thought to be safeguarded by a watcher or guardian, sometimes in the form of an animal. The treasure could also be bound to a place by the use of enchantments, runic magic, or by the use of specific objects (Burström 1993:17-20; Zachrisson 1998:42ff). It is not unlikely that the coin cache from the gallery grave in Öjaby parish was bound to the safe keeping of an ancient grave cist by the use of a Late Neolithic shaft-hole axe and by the placing of the cache in a Late Neolithic gallery grave (Kjellmark & Thordeman 1939:80f).

I believe there did exist a sort of awareness of the reused artefacts' ancient pasts, and that the reuse of artefacts, monuments and places can be understood in relation to their role in creating memories (Eckhardt & Williams 2003:146). The reuse of ancient features in Viking Age or medieval times should be regarded as an act of interpretation, in which artefacts, monuments and places were inscribed with what people considered an appropriate past. Artefacts and features originating from older periods were then in different ways reused in ritual practices, creating religious myths alluding to ancient pasts.

The use of horses in ritual offerings is also very well documented in archaeological finds as well as literary sources of the Nordic saga tradition (Tacitus, *Germania*, kap 11; Jennbert 2002). A total of 44 individual horses are mentioned in the Prose Edda, Odin's eight-legged horse Sleipner being one of the more famous (Snorres Edda, Johanson & Malm, *namnregister*). The horse is also an important aristocratic symbol (Jennbert 2002:121, 124). Ritual offerings of horses are also a common feature in wetlands, such as Skedemosse (Boessneck *et al.* 1968), Dagstorp (Carlie 2003), Röekillorna (Møhl 1997), and Eketorp (Backe *et al.* 1994). The head and feet of the horse were preserved, probably attached to the skin, while the rest of the animal may have been eaten at the sacrificial feast. Ritually deposited horses, mostly craniums, are also found in houses and barns, a tradition well documented in the folkloristic genre of legends from the recent centuries (Vensild 1985; Karsten 1994:145ff; Rudebeck 2000:56ff; Carlie 2004: 124-29). Even if the horse from Ullstorp stands out as unique, there is actually a parallel to the find. In a bog in Ullentuna parish, Uppland, several skeletal remains of horses were found, as well as objects of worked wood. One of the horse skulls had a sharp pointed stone still fixed in its forehead. In the middle of the bog the remains of a large, standing, oak post were found. The finds were radiocarbon dated to the first century AD (Olsson 1993).

By far the most common choice for ritual offerings in prehistory is waterlogged areas: creeks, rivers, seas, lakes, bogs and marshes (Hedeager 1999:256). The Toarp bog in Ullstorp parish lies at the bottom of a river valley, close to the boundary between three parishes (Ullstorp, Kverrestad and Bollerup). The medieval farmsteads surround the bog, and at the boundary between the three parishes there is a gallows, a nearby-lying mill and a thing. On a ridge to the east of the bog lie several tumulus graves, overlooking the valley. The bog has probably been used as a place for ritual offerings during the Late Iron Age; human craniums and Iron Age finds were found at the same time as the horse skull. There is also a recollection of finds of several human craniums not far from the gallows in Ullstorp (Wallin 1967:73). The Toarp bog might have been conceived as a liminal place, a threshold or entrance to other worlds. Hoards from the Viking Age were deliberately placed on the boundary between domesticated land and nature, and not uncommonly in the transitional or liminal zone between land and water (Hedeager 1999:248). Graves as well as execution cemeteries and places of execution are often placed at road junctions or county boundaries. There is also evidence that

meeting places such as markets, things and places for religious manifestations were situated on or close to roads or other kinds of boundaries (Wallin 1967; Rudebeck 2001; Reynolds & Lucy 2002). The bog's role as a sacrificial location during the Late Iron Age also meant the place attracted other liminal activities as time went by, such as places of execution and things.

There has been discussion among scholars on whether there is a cult continuity concerning the use of wetlands for ritual offerings during the Iron Age (Andrén 2002). Some have concluded that sacrifices in wetland areas came to an end around AD 400, and instead ritual sacrifices were performed in central settlements areas. This meant that the transition from pre-Christian to Christian time, from multifunctional hall buildings to churches, was much smoother (Fabech 1991). Lotte Hedeager disagrees with this interpretation, and instead she demonstrates how ritual sacrifices in wetlands continue during the Viking Age (Hedeager 1999).

PLACES, MEANING AND MEMORIES

When compiling all the archaeological evidence from the area surrounding the Ullstorp creek, it seems possible that the Toarp bog, at the time of the deposition of the horse skull, was somewhat of a focal point in the parish of Ullstorp. I am aware that not all of the features previously discussed show dating supported by literary sources from as early as the Viking Age/Early Middle Ages. However, I still think it is possible to assume that some of the places originate in earlier times and build on ancient customs, exhibiting continuity in space.

The parish of Ullstorp and its surroundings are rich in Stone Age finds, and deposits, graves, stray finds and occupational areas are commonly found there. The Stone Age features of the area were probably known to the people living in Ullstorp during the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages. The horse skull with its protruding Late Neolithic flint dagger is indeed spectacular, and I think it was meant to make a statement. A picture emerges of how a Late Neolithic flint dagger was found in the area and somehow incorporated into an already existing ritual practice or re-enactment of a mythological event, performed at the Toarp bog. The horse was not more than a couple years old when it was killed, perhaps born and bred only for this moment. The specific choice of the flint dagger was probably intentional, a ritual manifestation where the use of a dagger created a link to distant pasts. Icelandic sagas attribute certain qualities to weapons that have been remade from older objects (Ellis Davidson 1962:162; Williams 2005:265). Weapons are also associated with the past in early medieval written sources, and can be considered as part of exchanges between the living and ancestors of the past (Geary 1994:71; Williams 2005:265). The emphasis on the past might have been particularly important at a time of political and religious turmoil when new relationships were formed between people and the land (Bradley 2002:47). The specific use of an artefact linked to ancient mythology might also be just another example of the melting pot in which the old ways were intertwined with the official religious norm system in Scandinavia at the time (Carelli 1997:408). The Late

Iron Age reuse of places and objects associated with the past required an act of interpretation. The knowledge of how to properly use a flint dagger was, for example, lost to the people who set out to sacrifice the horse. Instead the dagger was put to use in a new manner and situation. Out of this interpretation, its mixture of confusion and fabrication, the past was renewed and reinvented in people's minds (Bradley 2003:226).

The Toarp bog might have been a place that was used time after time during the Late Iron Age. Places are spaces that have been inscribed with meaning (Van Dyke & Alcock 2003:4) as a result of past events. Every further addition to the place – every re-visit, every deposition of human, animal or object bodies – accumulated the memories bound to this place, rendering it a temporality. The passage of time at this site could be accentuated or diminished by every deposition, forming a kind of inter-site time capsule. The use of objects from a distant past could be understood as a way to bind and connect certain mythological tales to the present day of the Iron Age people. It was through the interplays between the accounts of oral tradition and the biographies of things that people without written documents were able to trace their histories (Bradley 2002:81). These interplays created an intricate weave of intersecting time lines, where past and present got tangled up in each other to such an extent that it became impossible to tell where one ended and the other started.

MATERIAL CULTURE – A NEVER ENDING STORY

The horse skull was according to several references found by a J.A. Sjögren in 1900. During my research I happened to come across the name again. It seems that there was an Alfred Sjögren, a taxidermist who between the years 1906 and 1910 sent a large collection of animals of North American origin to the college of Ystad, mostly bird skins. Alfred Sjögren was born in the southeast of Scania, but moved to Buffalo in North America and trained to be a taxidermist there. After his return from North America, Alfred Sjögren moved to Tomelilla and opened up a taxidermist firm. He worked for more than a decade with the bird skins from North America in order to stuff them and catalogue them scientifically according to species. When completed, the collection of birds was donated to the school (Löwegren 1974a:47).

Are Mr. J.A. Sjögren, finder of the horse skull, and the adventurous and widely travelled taxidermist Alfred Sjögren one and the same person? If so, is it possible that he was responsible for the horse skull, that is, did he fabricate the find? Keeping his future occupation in mind, he was perhaps a keen natural scientist with the right kind of knowledge for the task. Is the find perhaps a fake after all? If so, why did he do it – for fun, simply because he could, or was it for fame and glory? These are questions we may never have the answers to. At this point we can only conclude one thing – materiality matters (Oestigaard 2004:48)!

ENDING BY BEGINNING

I first encountered the horse from Ullstorp during my first years as a PhD student at the Department of Archaeology, Stockholm University. Working on a thesis on the flint daggers of the Late Neolithic (Stensköld 2004), I too was disappointed to find out about the dating of the horse skull. However, the horse from Ullstorp haunted me during the years I was finishing my thesis, and somehow it craved my attention. I promised myself I would return to the horse from Ullstorp once my thesis was finished. And so I have. The story told by following the traces of the horse has certainly proved to be far more intriguing and revealing than I first expected. It is my conviction that the story I have told here and now won't be the last page in the life history of the horse from Ullstorp.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Being primarily a Stone Age archaeologist, the journey into a completely new source material and area of research has been frightening but also surprisingly exuberating. As I have now already embarked on the trip into another world, the Iron Age, I can feel it is good to sometimes change course, to redirect one's scientific self in another direction. Now having commented on my background, I also want to take the opportunity to make an excuse for any errors or shortcomings in the text. My newly mastered knowledge of the Iron Age is far from solid, and any mistakes are therefore my own.

And for the record – no, I do not believe the horse skull is a fake.

English revised by Laura Wrang.

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“Ullstorp” SOFI, Språk- och folkminnesinstitutet, ortnamnsregistret.
http://www2.sofi.se/SOFIU/topo1951/_cdweb/s1lx001/106128c1.htm#upp

“Ullstorps kyrka”, Svenska kyrkan, Tomelillaabygdens församling, kyrkor.
<http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/tomelilla/>

“Ullstorp” Österlens släkt- och folklivsforskarförening.
<http://www.osterlen.com/slaktforskning/ullstorp.htm>

ABBREVIATIONS

ATA The Antiquarian-Topographical Archives (Antikvarisk-Topografiska Arkivet)
D. nr. Registration number (Diarienummer)

