

# Borderline Viewpoints

## The Early Iron Age Landscapes of Henged Mountains in East Central Sweden

Åsa Wall

The concept “henged mountain” refers to different archaeological categories of enclosure (hill-forts, enclosures and ceremonial enclosures) that have one thing in common; they all delimit a mountain top. This study focuses on the henged mountains of east central Sweden, taking its point of departure in the henges of eastern Södermanland. It is argued that the henges need to be understood as monuments with an influence over time. Instead of grouping henged mountains into separate categories divided by time, variation between areas is considered. The aim is to show that variations in the henge material express different ways of perceiving landscape and organising social life.

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### A UNIFORM PERSPECTIVE

Figure 1 shows the distribution of hill-forts (Sw. *fornborg*, i.e., ancient fort) in southern and central Sweden. In this paper I intend to discuss the hill-forts of east central Sweden, concentrating on eastern Södermanland and Södertörn. Although hill-forts are very frequent in these areas they have never really been discussed in a satisfactory way, since most of the hill-forts here are not really understandable from a strategic point of view. There are also numerous hill-forts in other parts of Mälardalen, for example in Uppland and Västmanland, just as there are many in Östergötland and on the west coast of Sweden. However, in other parts of Sweden hill-forts are relatively few, and in some areas they are completely absent. The “picture” of hill-forts as a uniform as well as a ubiquitous group of monuments has been created within the discipline of archaeology. The only discernible geographical divergence is between areas with hill-forts and areas without them. Any regional or local *variation* in this material is impossible to discern. In my opinion this is one of the major stumbling-blocks within hill-fort research at present. The root of the problem lies in the belief that an archaeological category always is, or ought to be, homogeneous.

In the course of this paper I will argue against the use of the term “hill-fort” and the different classes that have generated from it: enclosures (Sw. *vallanläggning*) and ceremonial enclosures (Sw. *gravhägnad*, i.e., enclosures containing graves [the English translation of these definitions is from Olausson 1995]). I will begin by introducing a

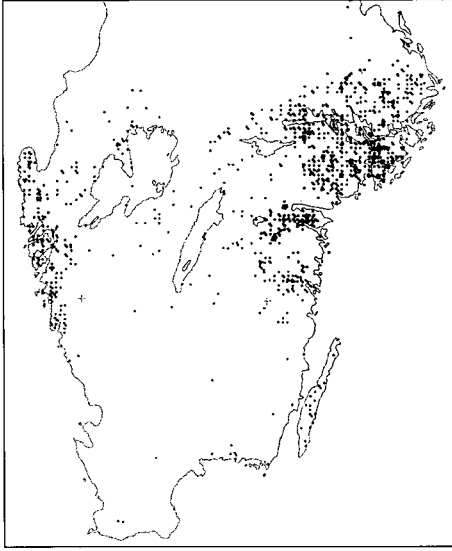


Fig. 1. Hill-forts in southern and central Sweden. (Hyenstrand 1984:88, map 30).

new concept: *henged mountain* (Sw. *hägnat berg*).

Henged mountain is intended to be a heterogeneous concept as it includes henges of different periods from the Late Bronze Age up to the Early Iron Age, 1300 BC – 550 AD (cf. Olausson 1995 for chronology). Usually henges from different periods are treated as different categories of monuments. Henges from the Early Iron Age are understood as “hill-forts” (cf. Olausson 1995:10) while older henges often, rather cryptically, are labelled “ritual” constructions. Ritual constructions, which

in reality means “non-defensive” structures, are termed “enclosures” or “ceremonial enclosures” (cf. Johansen & Pettersson 1993 for definitions). This twofold understanding of henges as defensive or non-defensive/ritual structures is an ideal division created by archaeological thought. The distinction between fortified and non-fortified enclosures is, however, not as obvious as it seems, and in practice the division is rather blurred. Attempts at defining measurable criteria for distinguishing “false forts” (Schnell 1933:244) from real ones have therefore been continual, becoming an important part of hill-fort research itself (see Olausson 1995:10, 24, 52 for a recent discussion). The main objective of hill-fort research has always been to depict hill-forts as a homogeneous group of constructions. The introduction of new categories in addition to the defensive hill-forts should be seen as an attempt to create a homogeneous class of defensive construction by singling out the structures that are not considered to be of a true fortified nature. Ceremonial enclosures refer to sites for rituals only, and enclosures are a combination of hill-fort and ceremonial enclosure. Critique of the hill-fort concept has never been aimed at questioning the hill-fort notion in itself, only at delimiting the real hill-forts from the rest of the enclosures.

My aim, then, is not to create a new label or classification for these monuments but to find a useful term, a tool, that enables analysis. The concept of henged mountain should *not* be considered a substitute for the hill-fort concept. In contrast to the hill-fort concept, the concept of henged mountain is intentionally heterogeneous and includes all structures defined as enclosures, ceremonial enclosures and hill-forts, and it is therefore neither static, pure, clean or sharply defined. Henged mountain is an all-embracing concept created to provide a possibility to discuss spatial *variation*. The notion of henged mountain includes all mountains, bergs and large rock outcrops upon which stone walls have been used to screen off the mountain top, the part of the mountain from which a view of the surrounding landscape is possible.

*Anomaly and context*

Although enclosures and hill-forts are considered to be different categories of monuments, they constantly appear to be connected in different ways. In some areas graves (Sw. *utmarksgravar*) are found in connection to hill-forts, but only in areas where we also find ceremonial enclosures (Sw. *gravhägnader*). In areas where there are no ceremonial enclosures, there are no graves in hill-forts either. In some areas hill-forts, enclosures and ceremonial enclosures are closely, and repeatedly, spatially connected. These connections are not possible to comprehend by using a defensive/non-defensive distinction and therefore appear to be anomalous. Problems arise when discussing henges that can neither be described as defensive constructions nor as showing any signs of symbolic undertakings, as in the case of the enclosures (Sw. *vallanläggningar*). These monuments in themselves become a “class of anomalies” and have been called a “grey area” (Olausson 1995:12), being neither the one or the other. Anomalies of this kind appear constantly in the material and should not be explained away in a simple manner. Anomalies should instead be appreciated as critiques of the various systems of classification that we use.

Classification is about organising existence in order to understand it, and the same applies to archaeological classification. Archaeological material is classified in order to render it comprehensible. Deciding on which contexts are relevant is a part of that process. Using the concept “hill-fort” implies that fighting and warring is the context of importance when trying to understand these monuments, at the same time as other kinds of phenomena associable with these places are disregarded. Instead of trying to create clean breaks between different classes of monuments I would like to try to unravel these congruencies as various local patterns of “hengeing” traditions. However, an important question that needs to be asked before I definitely discard the hill-fort concept, is whether the division of these monuments into fortified and non-fortified classes has *any* relevance for the way hinged mountains were understood in the past. In order to answer this, we need to find out why the fort concept was used in the first place.

## FOLKLORISTIC RETREATS AND HILL-FORTS OF SCIENCE

Across large parts of contemporary Sweden, mountains were hinged in the past. The hinged mountains have since been interpreted and understood in different ways. When considering the various ways hinged mountains have been understood in historic times, a difference between folkloristic and archaeological interpretations becomes apparent (e.g. Burström 1993). The archaeological classification of henges tends to consider the henges’ *morphology* and lately also their *chronology* (e.g. Schnell 1934; Engström 1984:92; Olausson 1995:15f), while folkloristic interpretations of hinged mountains tend to consider the monuments’ relationship to the surrounding *landscape*. These different points of departure, landscape versus morphology and chronology, are very different interpretative criteria. The presumption that hinged mountains are fortifications is, however, not uniquely archaeological but rather older than that. The question that naturally follows is, why were hinged mountains interpreted as hill-forts to begin with?

*Where did the hill-fort idea come from?*

The original purposes for building “hill-forts” are usually sought by researchers by making comparisons with forts from the Continent, where the idea of hill-fort construction is thought to have arisen in the past (cf. Olausson 1995:165 and there cited literature). I believe, however, that the idea that henges on mountains were once forts needs to be sought in the more recent past.

The notion of hill-forts was accepted early on by archaeological science. Fredrik Nordin (1881) was probably the first scholar to use the word *fornborg* (i.e., ancient fort), which he did in his paper *Om Gotlands fornborgar*. The idea that the henges were forts was, however, not a new one at the end of the nineteenth century. To get an impression of the varied understanding of hinged mountains before the birth of scientific archaeology one can turn to the large record of antiquities, *Rannsakingar efter antikviteter* (Ståhle 1969), from the later part of the seventeenth century. In this record there are numerous entries describing hinged mountains as old forts and strongholds but also many descriptions of henges as haunted places where giants, trolls, thieves and other kinds of mischievous phenomena reside. The later entries have been treated as irrelevant information by most researchers, though in reality these ideas are very important as they hint at the origin of the hill-fort concept. I believe there is a connecting idea that runs through all the various folkloristic tales, irrespective of whether the tales describe henges as forts or haunted places. The connecting idea is the interpretation of henges in relationship to their position in the landscape. These historic understandings of the hinged mountains are based on the relationship of the henges to the contemporaneous areas of settlement. The henges were situated outside the settled areas and were, according to folklore, places beyond the areas inhabited by humans. The hinged mountains were understood as the abodes of people and creatures on the *outskirts* of society, or as refuges *beyond* society used in times of hostility (fig. 2). The interpretations of hinged mountains as haunted places, or places of haunted people, are equivalents as they both draw upon the same organisation and understandings of landscape.

The difference between the folkloristic understanding of hinged mountains and the later archaeological classifications is that the tales express a *qualitative* understanding of landscape and the places that were hinged. When considering a qualitative landscape, we address the question of the meanings of space and the way in which people conceptualised, interpreted and understood their landscape (Harrison 1998:22 and there cited literature). Early archaeology adopted the fortification interpretation, but the qualitative understanding of landscape was never regarded as important, and instead it was the walls of the henges that were focused upon. This small manoeuvre, which originally came about to make the hill-fort interpretation scientifically acceptable, still conditions the categorisation of hill-forts at present. Classification is related to the presumed strength of the walls, while the crucial *qualities* of the mountain/place and the landscape are abandoned.

Landscape can be divided into three different conceptual levels: space as a *qualitative* entity; space as a *cosmological* entity; and space as an *empirical-geographical* entity (Harrison 1998:20f.). These levels are, of course, integrated by people during the course

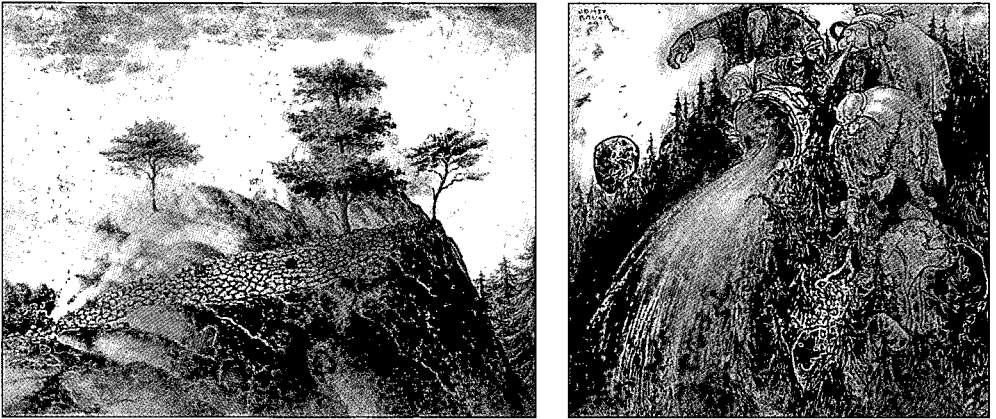


Fig. 2. The left picture shows the hill-fort at Axvik on Mörkö in eastern Södermanland. Drawing from 1928 taken from C. U. Ekström's book about Mörkö parish. The picture illustrates not only the early scientific understanding of the henges but also the folkloristic beliefs about them. The gun-ports are a product of fantasy. The right picture is a drawing by John Bauer: "Det dånade, brusade, väste, ven" ("It thundered, roared, hissed, whistled"), illustration from "Herr Birre och trollen", 1909 (Börtz-Laine 1981:68, fig 66). The picture gives an idea of how people experienced the places where hinged mountains are found as described in folklore.

of daily life, but for analytical purposes they can be split up. The landscapes considered within hill-fort research are usually understood as empirical-geographical entities. However, the idea that hinged mountains were once forts originally had, as we have seen, strong connections to a qualitative understanding of landscape. This qualitative understanding was transposed into archaeological discourse, and in doing so the qualitative hill-fort interpretation was changed into something that would appear empirical and concrete. Myths associated with hill-forts have therefore been criticised (e.g., Olausson 1995:25), but the hill-forts themselves have never been seen as myths.

To pursue the issue further we need to ask ourselves whether the originally qualitative interpretation of hinged mountains as places beyond the realm of social control, was a comprehension that was also of relevance for people during prehistory.

## MONUMENTS AND CHRONOLOGIES

The hinged mountains have certain characteristics that need to be given further attention; henges are *monuments* and as such they have a profound connection to their surrounding *landscape*. Problems concerning the henges' connection to the landscape and their monumentality are often entwined, but I will try to unravel some of them here. According to my understanding, landscape is the paths and places that constitute it (cf. Tilley 1994). Landscape is not a natural surface but a patchwork of different phenomena *attended* to and *articulated* by man. By "landscape" I mean the way in which people realise their world and how they connect to it. Landscape has played a rather remote part in hill-fort analyses. Instead, the main objective of hill-fort research has been to create a reliable chronology (cf. Olausson 1995; Engström 1984).

Henged mountains have been built continuously over a very long span of time. In certain time-periods construction was more intense than in others. Henges were sometimes rebuilt and reused in different periods (The excavated henge at Odensala prästgård in Uppland e.g. was used and reused over an interval spanning 1000 years; Olausson 1995:220), while other henges were only in use for shorter spans of time. The main problem when studying architectural structures within archaeology is that they are often treated as artefacts. In order to construct a functional chronology it is vital that different periods are represented by different types of material culture. Certain types of material culture thereby become the key evidence of a certain period (Sw. *ledartefakt*). Monuments and architecture cannot, however, be treated as artefacts (Bradley 1993:4, 1997:159). A monument has effects in other dimensions than an artefact; monuments have both a spatial and a temporal implication, and they have an effect across time and do not disappear from the landscape simply because a new era in history seems to be discernible (Barrett 1999:255f). Therefore monuments should not be treated as isolated entities, neither in space nor through time.

The Early Iron Age is considered to be a period of intensive hengeing, “the classic hill-fort period”. This period can be said to represent both the culmination and the end of a long tradition of hengeing mountains from the Bronze Age onwards, perhaps even beginning during the Neolithic (Engström et al. 1986; Olausson 1997). The meanings of hinged mountains during the most intensive period of hengeing, 200-550 AD, is what I intend to concentrate on in this paper. In eastern Södermanland it is very common to find hinged mountains in pairs, a phenomenon called *parborg* in Swedish (i.e., pair or twin fort, see fig.4). The two monuments in a pair are often of a slightly different date. The main issue here is that younger monuments are spatially connected to older ones. The architectural shape of the monuments appears to be more or less the same across time in an area, but differs between areas. In line with this, I do not think it is possible to study the meaning of henges during the later part of the Early Iron Age without considering their relation to the older monuments. By “older henges” I mean henges that were already entwined in people’s stories, tales and myths about the beginnings of society and their understanding of the world. It is therefore meaningful, when studying Early Iron Age henges, to include all the henges found in the landscape.

## LANDSCAPES...

I believe that the meanings ascribed to places in the past need to be understood not only in relation to the archaeological materials found at the places, but also in relation to the natural places that comprise the locales themselves (e.g., Bradley 2000). There are certain kinds of places that we, through ethnographical and historical information, know have had significant effects on people in different societies, in different parts of the world. These are places that, due to their physical dominance but also seclusion, have figured in people’s stories about the supernatural world and the origins of society (Taçon 1999:36-42). Examples of these kinds of places are locales where special geological formations were once formed (*ibid.*). Legends describing the marks in rock outcrops as giant footprints, created in times when the mountains were soft, are not

unusual in our part of the world (Burström 1994:48). Other important places are locations where different types of landscape converge (Taçon 1999:36-42); hinged mountains clearly tend to lie on boundaries of this type (see below). Other important places are those where exceptional elements like caves, strange cliffs or blocks of stone are found, or those places in the landscape that provide splendid views (ibid.). The hinged mountains exhibit all of these characteristics.

An important consideration when studying prehistoric understandings of hinged mountains is that the landscapes themselves were considered divine, in contrast to Western religion where landscapes were created by a holy god (Taçon 1999:42). Meaning was ascribed not only to those parts of the landscape that were physically created and changed by man, but also to those places that we understand as *natural* places (e.g., Wall 1998:146; Bradley 2000). The strange rock *face* on the hinged mountain at Lyngsta in Sorunda parish can awaken many associations (fig. 3). The reason for pointing out the importance of natural, meaningful places is to emphasise the significance of the mountains themselves, which is one of the reasons for creating the concept of hinged *mountain*. Henges are both a part of the mountains on which they are found and a part of the landscape and the other henges to which they refer. This makes it possible to begin to understand the, for us, often blurred architectural shape of the henges. The henges should be seen as integral parts of the mountains rather than as independent architectural edifices with meanings in themselves, which is how buildings usually are understood today. As an example, Yi-Fu Tuan discusses

Christian understandings of landscape and how churches are screened off from it (1990:148). A division between nature and culture of this kind is not discernible in the architecture of the hinged mountains. The henges do not dominate their surroundings but melt in and become part of them, which is very important when attempting to understand these places and their architecture. The hinged mountains can thus not be understood in isolation from any understanding of the physical world surrounding them.

At the end of the Early Iron Age, during the Migration period, the shape of the henges changes with the

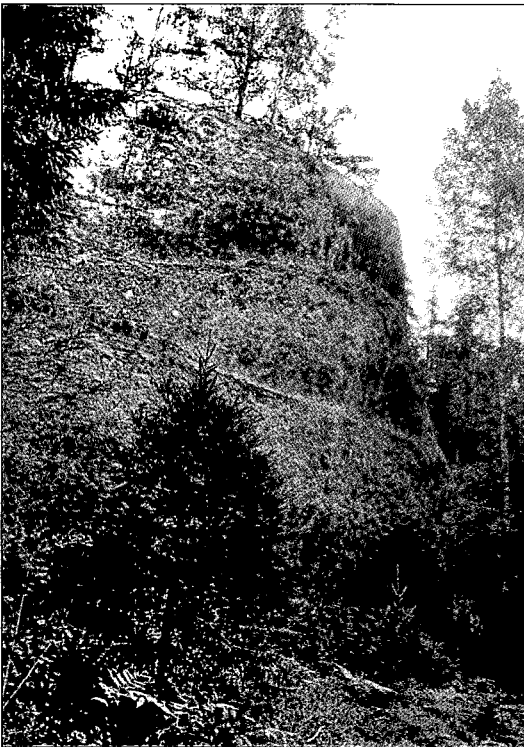


Fig. 3. Rock face. The hinged mountain at Lyngsta in Sorunda parish in eastern Södermanland. Photo by Ivar Schnell, 1926. ATA.

introduction of the so-called fortified manors (Sw. *stormannahägnader* [terminology derived from Olausson 1995]). This transition has been described and explained in technological terms (e.g., Olausson 1995:146ff), whereas I would rather argue for a change in how the landscape, the world, was perceived. Suddenly the henge walls *contrast* with the surrounding landscape, and I believe this is an indication of a profound change in world-view comparable to the nature – culture division described above. The “fortified manors” represent this change in themselves and also the end of the hengeing tradition. This period of change is, however, not the subject of this paper as it addresses other questions than those discussed here, and instead it will be analysed closely in my forthcoming dissertation.

The famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright supposedly once said that landscape is the simplest form of architecture. I would like to claim that landscape, in this case, should be described as the basic form of architecture. The physical landscape and the way it is perceived is a powerful aspect of the world and not an innocent backdrop. Knowledge concerning the world is always spatially bounded and never neutral or beyond the world. Understandings of the world always relate to humanised space, a kind of knowledge that is always geographical and that provides a certain way of understanding existence (cf. Barrett 1999:258; Hirsch 1995). In the following I will

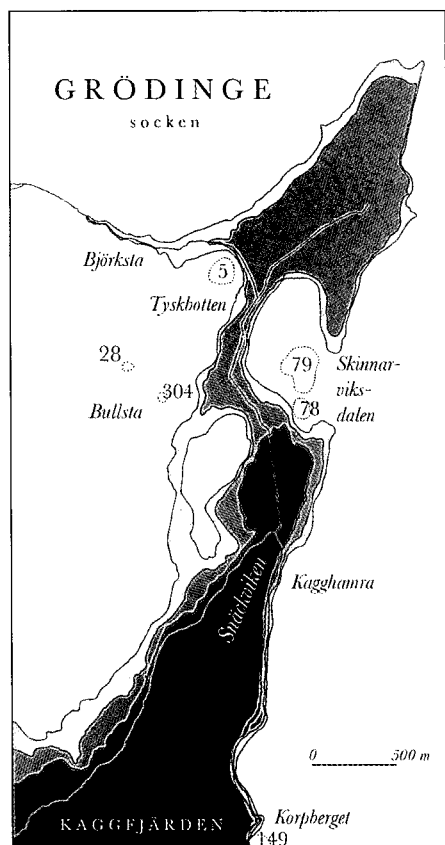


Fig. 4. A map of Snäckviken in Grödinge parish. In various shades of grey, from black (current sea level) to light grey, different sea levels have been drawn with 5 meter differences up to 15 meters above sea level. At 10 meters every henge is close to the sea. At the 15 meter level the channel that leads into Grödinge parish is divided by an island. The pair-henges RAÄ 304 and 28 and RAÄ 78 and 79 are found on each side of narrow passages that formed on each side of the island. RAÄ 304 and 28 are classified as ceremonial enclosures. RAÄ 79 is a large enclosure but with diminutive walls, while the henge RAÄ 78 is smaller but with manifest walls. These henges could be classified as a hill-fort and an enclosure, respectively according to antiquarian terminology. The pair-henges RAÄ 78 and 79 are typically found not on the point itself but on the boundary between the point and the mainland, a typical borderline position. The henges all have in common a position along narrow passages and at junctions. This is very clear in the case of henge RAÄ 5, which lies at the “cross-roads” between a north-bound land route and waterway and the overland route westwards. The map was drawn by the author following the topographical map.



devote attention to the hinged mountains of the Early Iron Age in Södermanland and the special, spatial perspectives that they suggest.

### *Borderland encounters*

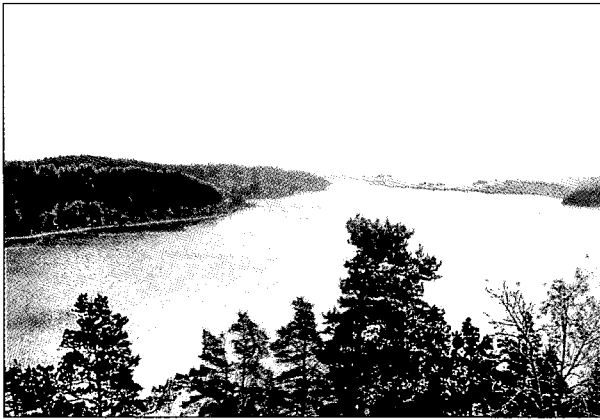
Returning to the question of the placement of the hinged mountains in the landscape, it becomes clear that some henges are found relatively close to the areas of settlement, as indicated by the location of cemeteries from the Early Iron Age. These henges can be described as positioned on the boundary between mountain and valley. Another common location is by the mouths of streams and adjacent to deep inlets and bays leading into the landscape (fig. 4). The last environment where henges are usually found is represented by large parts of borderland areas or land routes and waterways that lead through the landscape.

Groups of henges are often found at different *junctions* in the landscape, as depicted in figure 4. This occurs in every environment described above. The figure also shows how henges are positioned at “crossroads” of different kinds. From this we can conclude that henges are found in environments where people have met each other, places of encounter, which is quite a different arrangement compared to the haunted and remote places of later historic times. When considering the placement of henges, the most important characteristic is that they are always found on landscape *boundaries*, on borders between different landscapes. This becomes obvious when approaching a hinged mountain; you arrive from one landscape, and at the top of the hinged mountain a view is afforded over the next, as shown in figure 5. The most obvious border placement is seen in henges that lie between land and water. Henges that are found in larger borderland areas consisting of rock massifs and marshlands could, like islands, be described as borders in themselves. Interestingly, the henges in these areas are often found along more recent parish boundaries, which emphasises the fact that these places can be understood, and have been understood, as borders. Another clear example of the importance of boundaries are the henges on promontories. These henges are never found on the point itself (except in cases where the promontory can be described as a peninsula [Sw. *halvö*]), but rather, on the border between point and mainland (fig. 4). The emphasis on borders in the placement of henges is also obvious in light of other features of the henges, which I will discuss further on.

In sum, we can conclude that henges were built in areas where people came into contact with each other and in locations that can be described as borderlands. Borders can be understood as places where one thing ends and something else begins. These places are meeting points in a twofold sense of the word: Settlement was at this point in time dispersed in eastern Södermanland. People continually moved through the countryside, and the natural meeting points were at the crossroads in the landscape. Moreover, these places were also meeting points of a more elusive character; places where different aspects of the world converged, where one landscape met another, where light encountered darkness, where land faced water and mountain met sky. These are places where different aspects of the world were united, aspects that were emphasised by the building of the henges themselves.



Fig. 5. Henged mountain in Skärlinge, Sorunda parish on Södertörn in eastern Södermanland. The first picture shows the way up to the henge and the second picture the view from the henge itself. Arriving from one landscape, a view over another is afforded. Photo, 1927, by Ivar Schnell. ATA.



#### *A broken-up topography*

In order to create a clearer understanding of the places with henged mountains, we need to take a closer look at their landscape – the landscape of borders and crossroads. The physical landscape of eastern Södermanland is very special and has a “broken-up” topography consisting of narrow fissure valleys, large bedrock massifs and an undulating terrain. Travelling through this landscape means travelling across a series of enclosed spaces. Since the landscape is

cut up and difficult to look out over, it is never possible to perceive, or see, the whole landscape at once; instead it is grasped in stages. It is the connecting links between these stages, the landscape “episodes”, that are emphasised by the henged mountains. The individual episodes of landscape function, as I know from personal experience, as guides, with one episode of landscape succeeding another in a spatial story (cf. Tilley 1994). In order to experience this landscape you have to travel through it, and in this way totality belongs to movement; landscape is grasped through movement and memory.

There are many ways to ascribe meaning to the landscape of eastern Södermanland. The characteristics described here, the displaying of borders between landscape episodes, emphasises the importance that people in the past gave to their movement through the landscape.

#### *The theatrical setting of the Early Iron Age landscape*

Settlement during the Early Iron Age can be described as scattered and dispersed. This in itself constitutes a different social situation compared to historic times, when people usually lived in villages. The relationship between henged mountains and an agglomerated or a scattered settlement pattern creates two different kinds of scenic situation.

In relationship to an agglomerated settlement pattern, the henges wind up *outside* and beyond the areas and places settled by people. Further on, in relationship to a scattered settlement pattern, the henges end up *between* the dispersed households in such a way that the placement of the henges functioned as a connecting principle. Consequently, the significance ascribed to hinged mountains is thus completely different depending on how social life was organised.

The qualitative understanding of the hinged mountains in historic times, as forts and as the abodes of thieves and bandits on the outskirts of the social sphere, has its basis in a society where people lived close to one another, in villages. In the case of a dispersed settlement pattern, as during the Early Iron Age of eastern Södermanland, movement between different places was the foundation upon which social relationships depended. The boundaries between these places therefore became very important. Comparisons with other societies where social life is relatively mobile and dispersed, illuminates the argument further. Two native American tribes, the Navaho and the Zuni, can be used as an illustrative example. These two tribes have many things in common but have different kinds of social organisation, which can be given perspective by considering their different ways of perceiving their landscape (Tuan 1990:69). The Zuni world-view includes a strong sense of centre; the world is in the middle, which corresponds to how their settlements are compacted and agglomerated (*ibid.*). The Navaho social organisation is, however, not structured in the same confined way; their settlements are dispersed and spread out (*ibid.*). They do not have a common central place; instead every hogan (timber building, “hogan” means home) is considered a centre of its own (*ibid.*). Space is not defined so strictly as among the Zuni, but rather, the Navaho have a strong sense of the boundaries surrounding their territories which function as holy places tied in place by four holy mountains (*ibid.*).

Settlement in eastern Södermanland was dispersed, and the actual zones of contact between people were the boundaries of the landscape. Early Iron Age society can in this way be described as mobile; instead of having *one* centre used by a large amount of people we are dealing with *many places*, different parts of a network. This is important when considering the large number of hinged mountains in some areas, for example on Södertörn alone at least 90 have been registered. The dispersed settlement pattern and the importance of movement between different places as a part of social life are probably one reason why boundaries were conceived of as important places in the Early Iron Age.

### *Thresholds between horizons*

The fissure valleys are in several ways important aspects of the landscape in eastern Södermanland. The valleys function as pathways through the landscape; movement is confined to the valley floors and not across the often steep and inhospitable mountain areas. The valleys guide movement through the landscape and define its directions. The mountains that were hinged are those positioned between different valleys, in places where different types of landscape meet each other. This becomes obvious when you visit a hinged mountain: the walk up to the henge leads from one landscape to

another, as shown in figure 5. The borderline position of the hinged mountains is also reflected by the very walls of the henges. The walls are located on the mountainside that is intended to be climbed. The walls structure the space where you no longer find yourself in the dense and dark forest but still not up on the summit (fig. 6). The walls themselves highlight the significance of this zone, the border between two episodes of landscape. The wall is a liminal zone, a liminal place, but also a contrast to what it enshrines. The unlimited view from the mountain. The wall can be understood as a threshold between two opposite phenomena, a threshold between two episodes of landscape, and a threshold between two horizons. The concept “hinged threshold” (Sw. *tröskelhägnad*) is aimed at capturing part of the distinctiveness of these places.

Hinged mountains in eastern Södermanland are devoid of finds, that is, nothing is found in them that signals any inhabitation of these places. In that respect the henges differ from the settlements in the valleys, not only by being empty but also by being on a mountain, which in itself is the opposite of the valley. Mundane material, the remains of people’s everyday life, is not found on the hinged mountains, the view over their landscape is found instead. In this way the hinged mountains are ambiguous places that are both limited (the henge wall) and infinite (the view from the hinged mountain top). The absence of artefacts or cultural layers in the monuments often confuses archaeologists, and interpretations of this peculiar material absence are non-existent. I would like to point out that the emptiness of the hinged mountains reflects their borderline or liminal position in the landscape. An *empty* place is a very strong statement and is in itself a very powerful *material expression*. The hinged mountains are physically empty, uninhabited and situated some distance away from everyday life, in some societies these are distinguishing traits usually associated with sacred places (Hirsch 1995:4).

What all hinged mountains have in common is that they provide a magnificent view (figs. 5 and 6). Settlements and paths through the landscape are scattered below and stretch out along the valley floors. The view afforded from a hinged mountain is

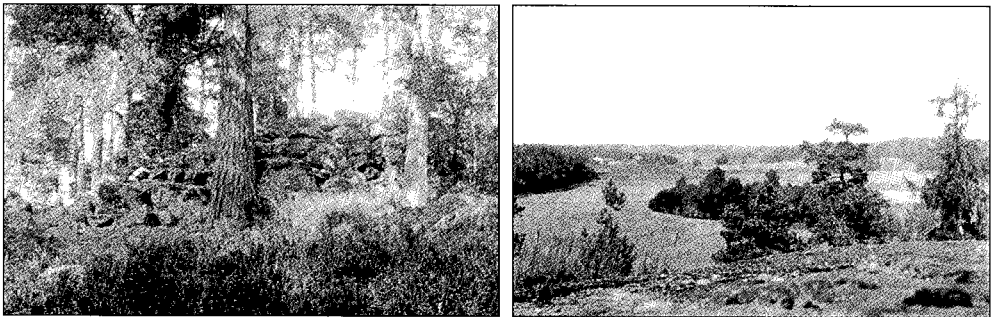


Fig. 6. The left picture shows part of the wall from a henge in Salem parish, Rönninge, on Södertörn in eastern Södermanland. The wall materialises the boundary between light and darkness as it lies between the dense forest and the open view. The wall can also be understood as a kind of instruction, pointing out the correct way to the mountain top. The picture to the right shows the guided view from the same mountain top. Photo by A. Carlö, 1929. ATA.

not wide, in the sense that you can see a whole landscape spread out below, but *focused*. One can say that the valleys of the broken landscape themselves focus our perception, but this phenomenon is also a consequence of the borderline placement of the henges. The henges have been built on thresholds between two horizons. When you arrive at a henge you leave one horizon, one landscape, and a new one appears. Through movement the hinged mountains both connect and pass on. The threshold placement and the focused view entails movement; thresholds are not symmetrical places, not balanced, but aimed in a direction. The special features that characterise the places of hinged mountains will in the following be referred to as *guided* phenomena, meaning that these places *lead on, direct and connect*.

### ... AND HENGED MOUNTAINS

The guidance phenomena described above seem to be valid for all the henges in eastern Södermanland as they emphasise the boundaries of the landscape. Not all the henges of east central Sweden are found along the landscapes borders, however. Instead, some henges seem to lie more towards the centres of inhabited areas. Birgitta Johansen and Ing-Mari Pettersson have pointed out the local differences among the hinged monuments of Södermanland (1994: fig. 8). They have shown that henges registered as “hill-forts” found in connection to burials have the same geographical distribution as “ceremonial enclosures” (i.e., *gravhägnader*), monuments which by definition contain burials. In areas where “hill-forts” do not contain burials, “ceremonial enclosures” are not found either. Different local and regional traditions seem to have been upheld over time.

In some areas of east central Sweden hinged mountains can be associated with *households*, while in other areas they can be associated with *borders* and *burials*. The hinged mountains in different areas surrounding Lake Mälaren show various tendencies towards both directions.

#### *Threshold henges and concentric henges*

Henges are usually ordered chronologically after the thickness of their walls (ceremonial enclosure, enclosure and hill-fort). In opposition to this preoccupation with size, I have decided to organise the material in accordance with the walls’ architectural design. This categorisation is spatial, not chronological, and it is based on two basic principles: first, the *open* architectural form which corresponds to the *guided* phenomenon; and second, the *closed* architectural form which corresponds to what I call a *concentric* phenomenon, as shown in figure 7.

Henges in flat landscapes, situated in flat terrain not on mountains, are probably the clearest expressions of a concentric and closed architectural form. The circular henges found on Gotland are among them. I do not mean to propose that there is a direct relationship between the circular henges on Gotland and the hinged mountains on the mainland, but the circular henges on Gotland are illustrative for my argument and therefore are discussed here.

Henges in the flat landscapes of Gotland are circular constructions with walls that

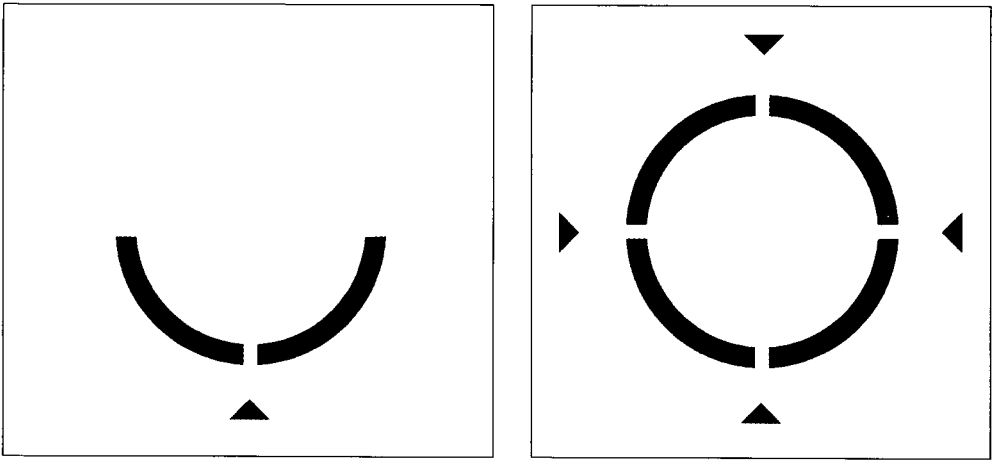


Fig. 7. The basic architectural principles of hinged mountains. To the left the open hinge principle, and to the right the closed hinge principle. The sketches should not be confused with plan-drawings or any other forms of measured reconstruction. The purpose of the simple figures is to describe how the architecture of henges could be experienced, how henges function in relation to movement.

enclose an area. The totally enclosing circular walls can be understood as representations of cosmos, as micro-cosmic models of flat landscapes where an observer is always positioned in the centre surrounded by a circumscribing horizon. The henges enclosing walls correspond to the horizon encircling the world, which is in complete contradiction to what I previously described as a guided phenomenon. The enclosing shape of henges in flat terrain do not mediate any movement. The circular henge is not a passage but instead in itself an object of destination, an end point mediated by the surrounding walls (see fig 7). Circular henges in flat terrain are common in the inland areas of Gotland, the areas that were settled (Cassel 1998:133, fig. 4.3).

In contrast, hinged *mountains* on cliffs, called *klintborgar*, are found along the island's coast (ibid.) where land meets sea, where one landscape succeeds another. Just like the hinged mountains of the mainland, these are found beyond the areas of settlement. The hinged mountains on Gotland's coastal cliffs are sometimes found in dense concentrations, just like the hinged mountains in mainland Sweden. Kerstin Cassel (1998:139) has written about the "hill forts" of Gotland and has pointed out that the cliff henges express a boundary phenomenon comparable to harbours which can be understood as places of arrival and departure.

The threshold henges of eastern Södermanland can be said to be the equivalent of the henges on the cliffs of Gotland. Threshold henges can be described as emphasised *passages* rather than *enclosures*. All the hinged mountains on the mainland cannot, however, be described as threshold henges, as guides of movement. Some of the hinged mountains also seem to correspond to the *enclosing*, concentric perspective described above.

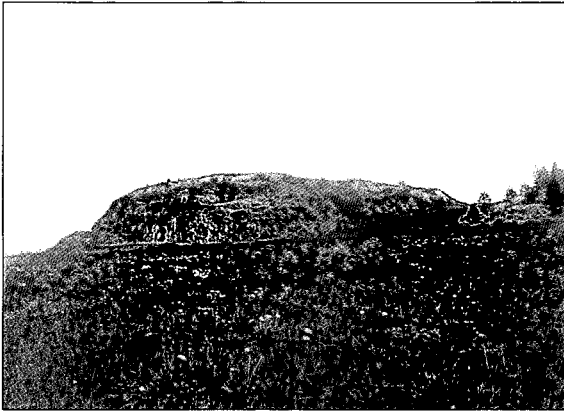


Fig. 8. The characteristic profile of Boberget seen from the plain. Photo from 1907. ATA.

fore diverge in a fundamental way from the henges found along boundaries in more distinct fissure valley landscapes. The hinged mountains in the relatively flat landscape of Östergötland do not, however, exhibit the same circular shape as the circular henges on the plains of Gotland. Nevertheless I still maintain that these hinged mountains can be understood as concentric in relation to people's movement (fig. 7). The henges on the Östergötland plain are found on pronounced mountains that literally shoot up out of the ground like exclamation marks, as in the picture (fig. 8) of Boberget in Konung-sund parish, eastern Östergötland.

The contrast of the mountains to the surrounding flat landscape offers the possibility of understanding the mountain itself as a central place. These mountains can be viewed and approached from *every* direction. The henges on these mountains also often have thick cultural layers, and large amounts of artefacts associated with farmstead production are found in them. Another phenomenon worth noting is that these henges have strong associations to systems of agricultural stone enclosures (Sw. *stensträngsystem*).

Henges without cultural layers and without any connection to settlements, henges that can be understood in relation to a guided movement, are also found in Östergötland. They are found, for example, to the north in the large bedrock massifs that separate the province from the Mälars area,

### *A comparison*

There is a range of different shapes among the hinged mountains in east central Sweden. I will begin my comparison in Östergötland, as the henges there reveal both similarities and differences when compared with the henges of Södermanland.

The hinged mountains found in the flat parts of Östergötland could, as in the case of the flat terrain henges on Gotland, be described as concentric. The henges in Östergötland are found in the midst of settled areas and there-



Fig. 9. View from Torsborg over the lake Lillsjön. Photo by Arthur Nordén, 1931. ATA.

between Bråviken and Lake Glan. The view from Torsborg by Bråviken, for instance, shows the characteristic guided view across the lake Lillsjön and the valley (fig. 9).

In comparison to Torsborg's guided view, the view out over the landscape from Gullborg in Tingstad parish in the same province is unlimited in every direction. The location of the henge is characteristic, in the middle of a widespread plain with a comprehensive view from the highly visible rock outcrop (fig. 10).

As we have seen above, there are some differences between hinged mountains in borderlands and those in the centre of settled landscapes. Henges that express the guided phenomenon can often be associated with *burials* but not with settlements. Burials can appear inside a henge or in its close vicinity, as in the case of eastern Södermanland. Burials, on the other hand, are as far as I know not usually found in connection to henges situated in the centres of settled landscapes, as in Östergötland.

The household/concentric – burial/guided distinction is only a loose framework, and henges in different areas seem to express themselves somewhat differently according to the local social context. The most pronounced examples of henges with a guided movement are found in the eastern parts of Södermanland, but they also occur in some parts of Uppland, especially the eastern parts. In these areas henges associated with burials also occur (Olausson 1995:221f.). Henges in western Dalsland and Värmland can also be associated with burials (Olausson 1995:221f; Lind 1993:36).

The most conspicuous examples of henges associated with a concentric movement are those found on the plains of Östergötland, mentioned above. They can be associated with settlements and not with boundaries and burials. In Västmanland there are no henges with burials (Olausson 1995:221 and there cited literature), and none in Närke either (Olausson 1995:222). Henges in Västmanland and western Uppland often have concentric shapes (e.g., Schnell 1934:45-94), which distinguish them from the henges in Södermanland. In Södermanland, henges with double walls do not occur as they do in Uppland (Olausson 1995:226). Moreover, many of the henges in Västmanland are located in more or less flat terrain and on lower mountains and plateaus (Olausson 1987:402). The most clear-cut, but also representative (Olausson 1987:402), example of a henge with concentrically built walls is Skovsta Skans in Västmanland (fig. 11). The hinged mountains in Västmanland connect to the perspective of circular movement

but in different ways than in Östergötland. The hinged mountains in Västmanland do not contain cultural layers, which are prominent features of the henges on the plains of Östergötland. Skovsta Skans is the only henge in Västmanland with cultural layers to my knowledge, but according



Fig. 10. Gullborg and the view over the plain. Photo by Bror Schnittger. ATA.



to Olausson (*ibid*) there could be more.

Henges in different areas of east central Sweden can be roughly divided into different local and regional hengeing traditions. This is a variation that is totally lost when attempting to divide them into strictly defined functional types.

### Summing up

From a social and a spatial perspective, the henges with a guided view can be understood in relation to people's movement across landscape. Mark Edmonds has noted that societies with a certain degree of mobility do not always perceive landscape as an object that can be divided into units. Paths and tracks that cross over each other and places and junctions that connect people are emphasised instead (1999:

20). Tim Ingold has expressed a similar idea (in this case concerning territoriality) and describes how mobile societies (foragers) control paths between places while sedentary peoples (agriculturists) enclose specific areas (Ingold 1986: Chapter 6). Richard Bradley has pointed out the importance of places that afford views over the landscape for mobile societies (1991:136). We can recognise these traits to a great extent in the henge material, although we are not concerned with "mobile" societies in the literal sense here. Even if settlement could be understood as "sedentary" during the Early Iron Age in eastern Södermanland, societies with a great degree of dispersal between settlement units can still be described as *socially mobile*. The emphasis on tracks, crossings, boundaries and places of encounter were highly pronounced by the hengeing of mountains. The hinged mountains express a social fluidity that is emphasised by the absence of systems of agricultural stone enclosures (Sw. *stensträngssystem*) in the region. Agricultural stone enclosures are seen as the fundamental traits of societies structured by a co-operative system of jointly organised properties known as *hågnadslag* in Swedish (e.g., Widgren 1983; Fallgren 1993). The systems of stone enclosures are very characteristic for *some* areas around Lake Mälaren, like the central parts of Uppland, the eastern parts of Västmanland and the plains of Östergötland. They are, however, not characteristic in general for the Early Iron Age settlements in east central Sweden. What seems to be the case is that the centrally placed henges often occur in areas with settlements connected to each other by systems of agricultural stone enclosures. The absence of agricultural stone enclosures, as for example in Södermanland, should be understood as directly related to differences in social organisation.

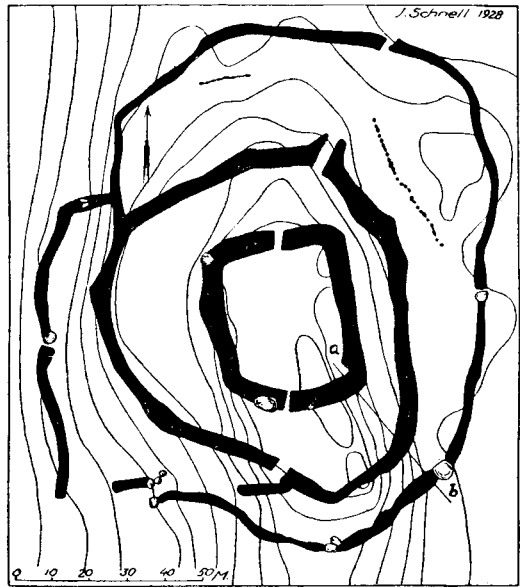


Fig. 11. Skovsta Skans. Plan from Schnell 1934:52, fig. 24.

The henges of *concentric* movement thus stand in contrast to the henges of *guided* movement. Instead of expressing a chain of movement like the directed threshold henges, the henges of concentric or circular movement express group-specific interests. The differences between the two kinds of henges can be described as two different kinds of *focus*. The circular henges on the plains of Östergötland focus on and are central within a *single* area; the henges focus on single groups of people. It is not unusual to find stone enclosures leading up to the henge monuments themselves, marking a strong connection to the joint households. The henges of eastern Södermanland, however, focus on an outward bound, expansive movement across the landscape, and therefore they also seem to be the concern of other people than just the single group, single groups not being central at all but wider social constellations.

By presenting this explicitly spatial analysis, I have tried to convey the idea of the henges as monuments that represent *focal points* around which many different social interests have converged. This is clear and probably readily acceptable when considering the henges of Östergötland with their cultural layers. What I have strived to describe however, is that other henges were also of great social importance in the past. Henges that today seem to have a peripheral position in the landscape, that *we* happily associate with fleeing refuges, as they have hitherto been interpreted by archaeology, or as the haunts of people and creatures on the outskirts of society as described in folklore, have in reality been places of central social importance.

#### *Measurements or meanings*

The problem I have attempted to address in this paper concerns the creation of indivisible entities. The hill-fort concept is a phenomenon of this kind, as is a region. Regions and hill-forts are both categories based on an ideal of unity, and as such they both tend to conceal the differences that are found within them (cf. Hylland Eriksen 1998:20). The hill-fort concept has been criticised, however, for being a heterogeneous, non-unified phenomenon. The objective of hill-fort research has therefore been to create a uniform category of structures by means of clearing out any ambiguous monuments from the true hill-forts. The same kind of problem presents itself when attempting to divide the archaeological record into regions. Characteristically a region is uniform, clear and has sharp boundaries. The price paid for this distinctiveness is, however, that the variation and gradual transitions are played down and repressed. Regions are modern administrative concepts that bear strong associations to the birds-eye view provided by maps. From a map perspective the world is measured and unique places are reduced into types. As in the case of the hill-forts, no relations are allowed to exist between the different categorised phenomena. A map perspective is “a boundary-dominated view” (Strang 1997:226). Measured boundaries are plotted out on a map in a way that is comparable to how measurements are used to classify different entities. The common goal is the creation of delimited and controlled categories (ibid.).

The reasoning I have advocated here has been concentrated on qualitative rather than quantitative perspectives of landscape and the places that were hinged. The difference between a qualitative and a quantitative approach is the desire to understand

meaning rather than to measure content. Christopher Tilley has described this difference as being a difference between scientific or abstract space and humanised or meaning-laden space (1994:8). Qualitative places cannot be reduced to quantitative shapes for classification. Hill-forts are just like regions, concepts that work in an excluding fashion. The concepts of threshold- and concentric henges are, however, intended to be combinable and are therefore variable. Instead of sharply delimited regions, the different hengeing traditions appear as part of a spectrum of continual variations and gradual transitions. By using open ended concepts like these, the relationships between phenomena in the record become important. The interplay between the two shapes can be described as dynamic. Dynamics are what is lost when the detailed specifics of the past are allowed to give way to the general.

*English revised by Laura Wrang.*

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