

Power, Europeanisation – Daily life at the castle and the farmstead in Sweden

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Värmland; 12th–15th centuries; social groups; clothing; food; architecture

During the 13th century Swedish society underwent significant changes on a national level, becoming distinctively more stratified. The same period saw the formation of the Swedish state and in many respects Sweden began to resemble her contemporaries in Europe. That certain people exercised authority over others was nothing new in itself, but the forms and the extent of this control were new. One important new way in which authority was expressed was through the attempts by the nobility and senior clergy to aspire to the same social status as their counterparts in other European countries and regions. There existed at this time common 'European' ideals concerning the conduct of the upper classes, including how a knight should behave, how individuals should dress and dining etiquette (see Ashley/Clark/Duby 1985). The strategy of social behaviour adopted by the Swedish nobility included distinguishing themselves from other social groups, expressed both in their individual, extrovert behaviour, including fashion, diet and table-manners, and their way of organising space (e. g. Caple 1990; Carelli 2001, 176 ff.; Elfwendahl 1999; Sponsler 2001, 1–2 and references presented therein, cfr. Kent 1990). However, the ambitions of the Swedish nobility to become more like their European counterparts were in many cases limited by both socio-cultural norms and economic realities. It is also far from certain whether the would-be subjugated social groups accepted their new role without resistance. In this paper I will examine the material culture of four sites (two farmsteads and two castles, dating from the 12th to the 15th centuries and located in the county of Värmland, western Sweden) in an attempt to understand the social dynamics of this period.

The farmsteads of Skinnerud and Skramle

In the 1990s I was responsible for the excavation of two farmsteads or hamlets in northern Värmland, western Sweden; Skinnerud (Emanuelsson et al.) and Skramle (Andersson/Svensson 2002). Both sites were originally located in forested, so-called peripheral areas. Skramle has been fully excavated and Skinnerud excavated to a large extent. Skinnerud had been inhabited continuously between AD 900–1300 (with its heyday in the 12th century), whereas Skramle was occupied in several phases spanning the 6th to the early 16th centuries AD. This article will examine the period AD 1250–1350. Both sites appear to have been inhabited by land-owning farmers, allowing certain comparisons to be drawn. Four house structures were excavated at Skinnerud; a hall (SHI), a cooking house (SHII), and two outhouses, possibly a store and a cow-shed (SHIII and SHIV). Approximately 300 artefacts were registered, mainly everyday items of iron or stone. The hall appears to have been the daily meeting place and was used for various activities, including leather-working (in the southern part) and even habitation during warmer periods of the year. Smithing had also taken place on the farmstead.

Skinnerud has been interpreted as the home of a single household, consisting of a nuclear family and one or two farmhands and maids, maybe with the addition of some unmarried siblings and elderly relatives. It should be noted that farmhands and maids in this area of Sweden in medieval and early modern times were mostly the children of neighbouring farmers. Fostering was an established part of the education of potential farmers and house-

wives, and not a sign of social segregation (Andersson Flygare 1997, 188 f.).

The excavations at Skramle revealed four dwelling houses (HV1a, HVII, HVIII and HX), one with an adjacent smithy (HV1b), a combined cow-shed and barn (HXIV), and two other outhouses (HV and H XIII), belonging to the period c. AD 1250–1350. Four fields, believed to be contemporary with this period, were also mapped. The dwelling houses HV1 (with adjacent smithy) and HVII are believed to belong to the first half of the period in question, and the dwelling house HVIII to the second half. The other houses appear to have been in use during the entire period. Approximately 600 artefacts were recovered, the majority being everyday items of iron or stone. Apart from black smithing, taking place first in the smithy (HV1b) and later at an outdoor place behind HVIII, production of various items of soapstone (between HVII and HVIII), knapping on other stone-materials (just north of HXIII), textile production (in all dwelling houses) brass casting (just west of HVII) and daily household work are visible in the finds-material.

Skramle has been interpreted as a minor hamlet with three independent households during the first half of the investigated period, and two households during the second half. The households were presumably of the same composition as proposed for Skinnerud, or simply nuclear families.

The farmers at both Skinnerud and at Skramle were involved in outland use, i. e. the exploitation of a variety of resources in the forested outlands of each farm or hamlet, both as a means of increasing self-sufficiency and as a way of producing marketable goods. The production of marketable goods was an important way for farmers to earn money that could be translated into conspicuous symbols for consumption at a level with their desired social station (Martens 1992, 5; Martens 1998; Svensson 1998; Svensson et al.).

The castles of Saxholmen and Edsholm

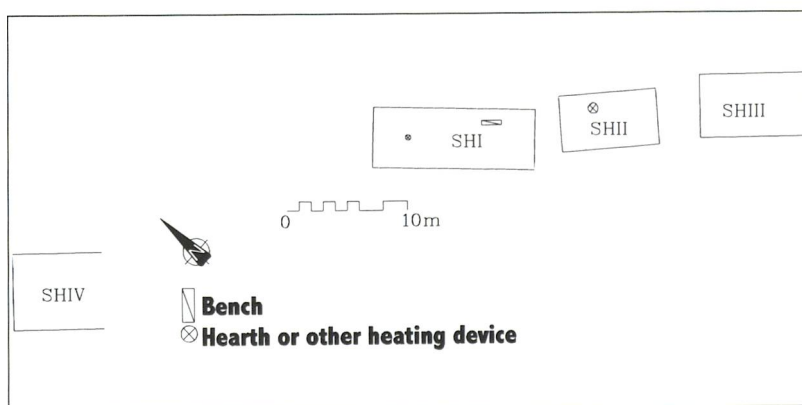
The castles of Saxholmen (not yet published) and Edsholm (Pettersson/Svensson 1997; Pettersson/Svensson 2000) are located in the southern plains area of Värmland, and were

both built on small, rocky islands. The castle of Saxholmen was in use during the second half of the 13th century, and was most probably built on behalf of the king by a close supporter as part of the royal expansion strategy in this period. Edsholm was erected in the 1370s and burnt down during a rebellion in 1434. The bailiff was housed at Edsholm and the castle functioned as a centre for administration and collection of revenues in the district of Värmland during a period when Sweden, Norway and Denmark were in union ('Kalmarunionen'). The bailiffs at the castle, most often Swedes, belonged to the higher nobility.

Saxholmen was excavated between 1992 and 1996. The whole area was not excavated, but most of the remains were mapped in detail. The structures included a masonry tower, surrounding walls with entrances and extra fortification elements, a storehouse (S), three 'dwelling' houses, a workshop (A), a smithy, and two jetties with a boat house. A natural bay was possibly used as a harbour. Also identified was a lime-kiln and other constructions related to the building of the castle.

The masonry tower (T) was most probably used for storage and reception in the lower level, while the upper floors probably served as accommodation. The 'dwelling' houses had diverse functions. The largest of them (H) served as a daily assembly hall for the inhabitants of the castle and probably also guests. This house was also used for accommodation. The house lying to the north of the tower (L) was the ladies' house (Sw. *frustuga*). The third dwelling house (G) was better constructed than the other houses. Approximately 2000 artefacts were collected, many of them everyday items of iron and stone, but there were also a considerable number of more luxurious items.

Fig. 1: The houses at Skinnerud.



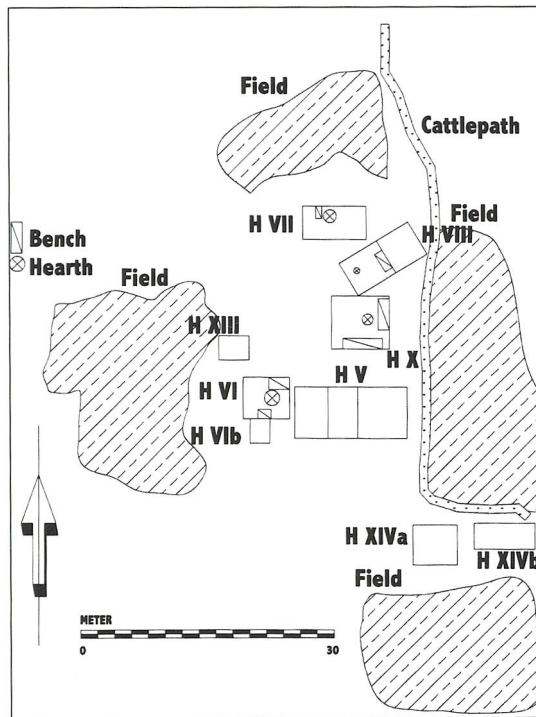


Fig. 2: The houses and fields at Skramle from c. 1250–1350.

According to the osteological material the inhabitants of the castle had been self-sufficient in the production of meat. There was also black-smithing (in the smithy), bronze casting and bone (not antler) working (in the workshop).

The garrison of the castle is believed to have consisted of an extended family, *familia*, of the high nobility. The *familia* was ruled by a head and included several other nuclear families, some of which would also have been of noble descent (see Herlihy 1985, 2 f.). Saxholmen was inhabited only during summertime by this extended household, but there were probably some permanent staff on the island, most probably occupying the better built dwelling house (G).

The main castle at Edsholm was excavated in the middle of the 20th century, and the bailey was excavated in 1991–1992. The cultural layers were disturbed in many areas due to later activities within the bailey.

The main castle (1) was built of stone and the ground floor divided into two parts. There were likely to have been at least two storeys, with the upper storey serving as the accommodation for the bailiff and his family, and the lower storey as storage space. Five house structures, all burnt, were discovered and excavated at the bailey. Various functions were detected; an assembly house for the garrison (2), sleeping quarters for the garrison (3), a

dwelling house, maybe for a low ranking commander (4), handicraft (5) and, within the same structure, an administrative space for a scribe (6a) and stable for the lord of the castle's charger (6b).

Approximately 3000 artefacts were collected, of which c. 400 came from the main castle. Most of the artefacts were items of iron and stone, but there were also some objects of bronze and a number of beads. Analysis of the assemblage reveals a clear distinction between the main castle and the bailey. The material from the bailey is of a military character, with many examples of basic weapons and pieces of armour. There were also a number of objects related to gaming and drinking. The material from the main castle consisted more of objects that could be related to persons of a higher social status and to women.

The garrison at Edsholm has also been interpreted as an extended household, but of a different character than that at Saxholmen. At Edsholm the bailiff and his family with servants would have been dwelling within the main castle, whereas the bailey clearly functioned as a male area, most probably inhabited by mercenaries from other parts of Scandinavia and Europe. The foreign status of the mercenaries is presumed on the basis of the building style and food consumption that will be discussed below.

The clothing makes the man

When trying to reconstruct the clothes worn by the inhabitants of the four investigated sites, our clues exist mostly in the form of metal-artefacts as textiles are absent.

A number of artefacts associated with clothing were located at Skinnerud, including four beads, three buckles of bronze and iron, six hooks and eyes of bronze and iron, and 31 mountings (threads and sheet metal objects from the belt and other dress-details in bronze and iron). The beads must have been imported to Skinnerud, and they should be seen as a means of expressing wealth by the well-to-do Scandinavian housewife. However, the relatively large number of hooks and eyes should be considered as an expression of local fashion.

At Skramle there were fewer objects connected with clothing, including a single bead, a hook, a button, three sheets of bronze, six

buckles, a ring brooch in bronze and a heraldic mounting. Five of the buckles were of iron and of simple character, but the sixth was of decorated bronze. The dress accessories from Skramle give a double impression. On the one hand there are the simple but adequate, iron objects indicating the modest farmer. On the other hands there are objects, such as the heraldic mounting, that rather belong to the dress of the nobility. The suggested interpretation is that it was important to be a modest farmer, an equal among others, within local society (which in this case consisted almost exclusively of land-owning farmers and their families). But when meeting the outside world it was the wealthy and important forest farmer (who could have competed with the nobility if he pleased) who was on display.

The assemblage from Saxholmen included many dress accessories, some indicating high status. There were 136 objects of sheet bronze, iron, lead and other metals, six chains of bronze and iron, six buttons of iron, wood, pewter and cornelian, ten brooches of bronze and iron, three pieces of decorative threads of bronze, silver and gold, a gold plated dress jingle, five finger rings of gold and bronze, 15 beads of glass, rock crystal, bronze and metal, 18 buckles of iron, bronze and other metal, a gold plated strap lock, two heraldic mountings, a semiprecious stone engraved in the form of a Roman bust, 40 pieces from mail

coats, and six other armour details. One of the buckles and seven objects of sheet metal were gold-plated. Many of the artefacts represent a luxurious character and were presumably carried by persons belonging to the nobility. The outstanding nature of the dress accessories at Saxholmen compared with the two farmsteads, and also compared with Edsholm (see below), clearly reveal the importance of fashion and the display of social status to the household at Saxholmen.

Judging from the mail coat and the large numbers of artefacts associated with armour found at the bailey at Edsholm, people were 'dressed' in armour most of the time. 160 objects associated with armour were located at the bailey, whereas the corresponding number for the main castle was eleven. Other dress accessories located at the bailey were 107 sheets/plates of bronze and silver, a hook, seven buttons, six beads, 20 buckles and six more undefined objects of iron associated with dress. At the main castle 15 sheets/plates of bronze, a button, two beads and six buckles were found. Of the buckles from the main castle at least one was decorated, being more like a brooch. The relatively large number of sheets/plates of bronze and silver from the bailey are associated with the production of bronze items in the handicraft house (house 5). Judging from the character of the goods produced in the handicraft house, the most likely destination was for

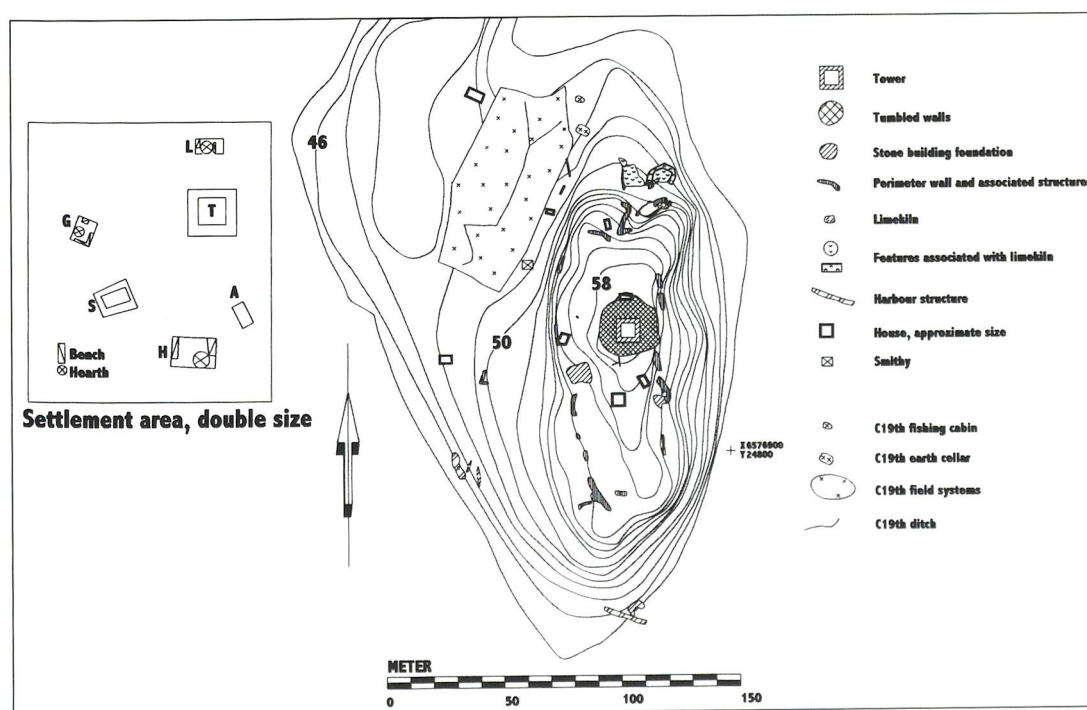


Fig. 3: The various constructions at Saxholmen. The settlement area enlarged.

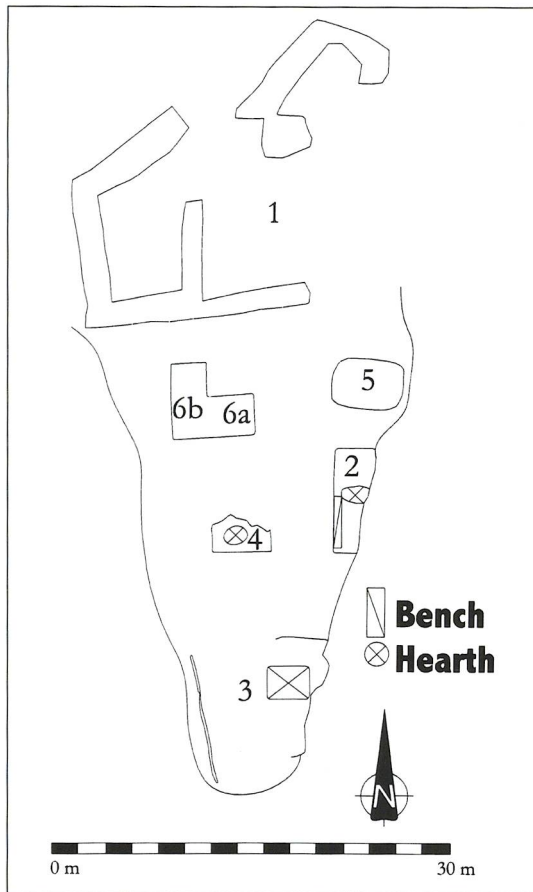


Fig. 4: The buildings at Edsholm.

use in the main castle and not for sale outside the castle or use at the bailey. The beads located at the bailey are believed to have been parts of a rosary, and not carried as dress accessories in a more direct sense. Taken together, the castle of Edsholm appears to have been a place dominated by men in arms. This is particularly apparent for the bailey, which seems to be almost void of items indicating a female presence. There are more indications of a female presence in the main castle in the form of beads and maybe also the brooch. Sewing needles and a thimble were also located in the main castle. There seems to have been a clear social stratification between the main castle and the bailey, that was demonstrated e. g. in the use of bronze accessories at the main castle, items produced mainly at the bailey.

“You are what you eat”

The food at Skinnerud appears to have been basic in nature. According to the macrofossil analysis barley and oats were cultivated and

consumed, while the osteological analysis indicated that sheep/goats and some cattle were kept and eaten. The diet at Skramle seems to have been more elaborate. Wheat, barley and oats were cultivated and consumed, while the meat diet consisted mostly of sheep/goat but there is also evidence for cattle, pig and chicken. It is likely that this more elaborate diet was due to urban and/or aristocratic influences.

The pattern of food consumption at Saxholmen did not differ greatly from that at Skramle. According to the osteological material, meat from sheep/goats, cattle and pigs dominated. Bones from wild game, tame birds and fish were very sparse. Barley was the most common cereal but there were also indications of oats being part of the diet. It appears that the *familia* at Saxholmen prioritised exclusive food rather less than exclusive fashion. The macro-fossil and osteological material from the bailey at Edsholm was abundant and provided ample information on the inhabitants' diet, but no such material exists for the main castle. Mostly cattle and small quantities of sheep/goat, pig and some chicken were brought to the castle as food. The garrison had been hunting elk and hare, and there is evidence for fishing; salmon, herring and cod were consumed. Cereals include barley (most common), wheat, oats and small quantities of rye. A vaulted oven, suitable for baking fermented wheat-bread, suggests that the baking facilities at Edsholm were more elaborate than at the other sites. It is likely that the garrison had quite high demands concerning their diet. Concerning cooking vessels and tableware, evidence from the rural sites is sparse. This can be attributed to the lack of ceramic and wooden artefacts of these types: ceramic was probably never used and wood would not have been preserved (Gustavsson 2002). At Skinnerud two handle grips from iron cauldrons were found, and at Skramle 48 sherds of soapstone vessels and three sherds from a bronze vessel have been located. Pots of soapstone were produced for sale at Skramle, but it is likely that they were also used within the community. The presence of a bronze vessel at Skramle hints at the same idea of status as the occasional, luxury dress accessories, namely that the Skramle farmers were influenced by urban and aristocratic associations and that they participated in a social dialogue within aristocratic circles.

The tableware at Saxholmen appears to have been more elaborate than at the two farmsteads. Five pieces of bronze vessels, one sherd of a (soap)stone vessel, one sherd of a glass vessel, 85 sherds of pottery, eleven pieces of iron cauldrons and a gold-plated spoon were found. The ceramics included parts of jugs, dishes and other vessels, about half being of red earthenware of various kinds and the other half of simple black earthenware. A few sherds were from stone ware. Although these artefacts may not be considered the remains of an outstanding set of tableware, it is clear that more effort had been put into the display of the food and drink at the table than into the food itself. At Edsholm the tableware was more elaborate and diversified. At the main castle a sherd of a soapstone vessel, a sherd of a bronze vessel, four pieces from iron cauldrons, eight sherds of glass vessels, six sherds of pottery, five sherds of stoneware and a sieve were found. From the bailey a sherd of a soapstone vessel, five sherds of a bronze vessel, ten pieces from iron cauldrons, seven sherds of glass vessels, two sherds of pottery and 22 sherds of stoneware were located. In this case there seems to be little difference between the main castle and the bailey, but it should be noted that the material from the bailey is dominated by drinking vessels or jugs – mostly located together with gaming pieces in the assembly house for the garrison (house 2).

A final comparison concerning the table manners should be discussed, specifically the way in which animal bones were disposed. The animal bones at Skinnerud (c. 0.4 kg), Skramle (c. 0.5 kg) and Saxholmen (43 kg) had been burned and disposed of mostly outside the houses. At the bailey of Edsholm c. 500 kg of animal bones (mostly unburned) had been disposed of both inside and outside the houses! Presumably the inhabitants of the main castle had behaved somewhat more hygienically.

Architecture and social space

The houses at Skinnerud appear to have been built of wood. The hall (SHI) seems to have been stave-built, while SHII, and most probably also SHIII and SHIV, appear to have been log-timbered, in accordance with the local building tradition from later periods. There were no clear divisions within or between the

buildings that might have indicated access restrictions for different groups, nor did the spatial distribution of the artefacts give any such indications. On the contrary, various artefacts that may be associated with women or men, or which could be used to identify social segregation, appeared mixed within the excavated area. This is in accord with the interpretation of the site as inhabited by a socially homogeneous household. Only specific activities, such as leather working and black-smithing, were located in special areas.

All houses at Skramle were log-timbered, in accordance with the local building tradition from later periods. The houses were quite small in area and there are no indications of spatial divisions within them. Most of the artefacts were found in and close by the dwelling houses, indicating the importance of indoor activities. The spatial distribution of the artefact material does not indicate that there were any access restrictions based on gender or social rank to any buildings or areas, but rather that people mixed freely in the dwelling houses. It is also likely that visitors were invited to the dwelling houses, as there was no hall or other assembly building, giving the dwelling houses distinctive public functions. However, there does seem to have been a gender-based segregation based on the performance of specific activities connected with the working routines of the community, but these segregated areas should not be considered *restricted* areas to the opposite sex. The male crafts, such as black-smithing, soapstone handicraft, stone knapping and brass casting, were carried out at specific sites (see above), whereas the female tasks, cooking and textile production, were carried out in all of the dwelling houses. This spatial division of work tasks indicates that the male crafts were conducted as communal projects, whereas the female work was related to each specific household.

The buildings at Saxholmen were of wood, with the exception of the masonry tower and the storehouse. The masonry tower, measuring 10 x 10 meters in plan and maybe 20 meters in height, was built of dressed stones and some brick, probably used as ornament, such as window-vaulting. The storehouse was partly built of wood, but included a high, stone foundation and a brick-built vault. These two buildings were of great symbolic importance. The house of the permanent garrison seems to have been

log-timbered whereas the other houses were probably constructed of prefabricated timber-frames that were put up with rivets and plates. Apart from the log-timbered house (G), the building techniques used at Saxholmen were not of local character. The hall (H) was most probably used by the whole garrison without regard for gender and social rank. The ruined masonry tower (T) is difficult to analyse within these terms. It is likely that access to different levels was restricted to certain people, e. g. that the family of the lord of the castle had access to all floors including probable dwelling quarters. Two houses appear to have been used in a segregated way, the ladies' house (L) and the permanent garrison's house (G). The inhabitants of the first house were women and those in the other house were among those with lower social rank in the household at Saxholmen. Whether these buildings were *restricted* to others is hard to tell. The topographical setting on a small rocky island, the architecture and the composition of different buildings at Saxholmen correspond well with the general concept of a castle, both in Sweden and in other parts of Europe (cfr. Lovén 1996), although these concepts were often realised in a more illustrious way than at Saxholmen.

Surprisingly enough, all houses at the bailey of Edsholm, with the exception of house 6b, were half-timbered. Half-timbering was not used in this part of Scandinavia during medieval times, but was common in southern Scandinavia and on the northern continent (see e. g. Augustsson 1992, 62 f.; Werner 1924, 87 ff.). The

stable (6b) was log-timbered, a local building tradition. The use of half-timbered houses has been interpreted as a wish to make the bailey more 'home-like' to the garrison of foreign mercenaries, but also as a way of distinguishing this structure. The stone-built main castle must have been an important symbolic building, not only within the surrounding areas but also in comparison with many other contemporary Swedish castles that were built of wood (Lovén 1996). As has been stated before, the bailey was clearly segregated from the main castle. This segregation was based both on social status and gender, as the lord of the castle with family and servants dwelled in the main castle whereas the male mercenaries and artisan(s), together with the lord's charger, were restricted to the bailey. The southern wall of the main castle appears as an important spatial border, the impression being given is that access to the main castle was restricted for the mercenaries. It had apparently become increasingly important to also segregate within the household. At Saxholmen one can see tendencies towards an inter-household segregation based on gender and social rank, whereas at Edsholm segregation, mostly based on social rank, is highly developed.

It is clear that the Swedish aristocracy was able to redefine their social status during the late 13th century and onwards, distinguishing themselves from other wealthy elements of society, such as the land-owning farmers. But however hard they tried, they could not compete with their counterparts in many other parts of Europe.

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