

Some remarks concerning private fortification in Scania and stilted towers in Denmark

By Ingolf Ericsson

It is remarkable that small noble castles are exceptionally rare in Scania. The most typical private castle of western and central Europe – the motte – is practically unknown, as are crannogs. On the other hand some large castle-mounds, like Turestrup (fig. 1) and Vallen (figs. 2-3), as well as manorial sites e.g. Svenstorp (fig. 5) are known. The Scanian development differs from that of present day Denmark, where a lot of mottes and other small castles of the nobility and gentry is known. They often belong to the second third of the 14th century. The situation in Scania, on the contrary, with its few private castles is very similar to that of medieval Sweden. More attention should be paid to the fact that Scania, during the period of

intense private castle-building in medieval Denmark actually did not have a Danish regent. Between 1332 and 1360 Scania was ruled by the Swedish king Magnus Eriksson. This could be at least one of the reasons for the similarity of development of private fortification in medieval Sweden and Scania during the 14th century.

At the end of the Middle Ages and in the early 16th century private noble sites were normally manors without true fortifications. Between 1396 and 1483 it was forbidden to fortify private residences. The only real private castle of medieval Denmark, that we know was built during this period, is situated in Scania – Axel Iversen Thott's Lillö (fig. 4). A later example is the famous Glimminge built by Jens Holgersen Ulfstand in 1499.

In the second part of the paper the existence of 'stilted towers' with an open ground floor is discussed on the basis of tower remains at Abinger, an English motte excavated in 1949 (fig. 6). This interpretation by the excavator B. Hope-Taylor (cf. figs. 7-8) was also accepted by Danish scholars, who were searching for local parallels. The paper argues against this interpretation. It is far more probable, that the 'stilted' construction of Abinger – as well as that of other mottes and crannogs, also in Denmark – was a pile substruction or foundation of a wooden tower.

Finally, two central problems of Southscandinavian fortification research are mentioned: the lack of a clear and unmistakable terminology and the relative lack of modern excavations. The interpretation of medieval fortification in Denmark is still often based on limited written sources, in which mainly sites and/or owners are mentioned, or on structural parallels/similarities with far better preserved fortifications from abroad. The possibilities of modern medieval archaeology should be applied far more to castle and fortification research.