



## Gender and spatial patterns in the Scandinavian farmstead and outland

Research into the subject of rural settlements and landscapes, including the niche occupied by outland archaeology, is a field of growing importance in Scandinavia. This phenomenon is not limited to one discipline and it is common for a research programme to employ interdisciplinary methods. Even within rescue archaeology greater attention is paid to these elements of the historical landscape, not least in Norway. This increased focus has resulted in both new material and new theories. However, there is still a considerable lack of empirical material relating to this subject, or rather, the available material is fragmented. By this I mean that few research programmes have attempted to achieve a holistic understanding of rural settlement together with associated infield and outland, which together constitute the principal arenas for daily life and basic production. This means that it can be difficult to relate actors to their specific arenas and to understand the complexity of these arenas. Even in those fortunate cases where it has been possible to investigate, using interdisciplinary methods, a well preserved settlement together with its infield and outland, much information is still lacking. Many activities of the past are quite simply invisible to modern research techniques. It is also easy to forget that the arenas of these farmers were much larger than the immediate landscape of settlement, infield and outland. Towns were visited on trading tours, regular visits were paid to the parish church, and also to the local courts, to name but a few.

In this article, I intend to examine the archaeological evidence for gender-defined social space on two medieval farms, which were inhabited by forest farmers actively engaged in outland use.

In early modern and modern times, the forested zones of central and northern Scandinavia were characterised by a greater social and gender equality than southern Scandinavia, where cereal cultivation predominated (Johansson 2002a:15-16). The shielings (Sw. *fåbod/säter*) of northern Scandinavia, where women tended cattle mostly during the summer months, were the physical embodiment in the landscape of this equality. It is often suggested that women experienced a greater degree of equality in northern Scandinavia also during the Iron Age and Middle Ages (e.g. Rathje 2001).

Within social archaeological studies of this kind it is important both to identify archetypal actors, i.e. the men, women and children on a farm, and their specific arenas. The study of social space at the investigated farms will be conducted through the analysis of the spatial distribution of artefacts, while the outland areas of the farms will be examined through the physical remains left by outland use. This will highlight the actual arenas of these forest farmers, from the outland to their homes. In one case, investigations into outland and outland use have been conducted using interdisciplinary methods. Even so, this thorough case study is also fragmented because it lacks information regarding all of the various aspects of life on the farm. I believe that this is not a haphazard phenomenon, but rather a consequence of the intentional construction of the cultural landscape of the outland areas.

### **'Work' as a social category, and labour division according to gender**

I will here discuss the significance of everyday life, or routine behaviour, as a structural factor within various levels of society (Giddens 1984). Gender patterns, household organisation and social stratification were formed and negotiated through the structures of everyday life. I will primarily focus on a single aspect of everyday life, the category 'work'.

Organisation of work and labour division were (and still are) important social principles that are often underrated in today's archaeology. This is mostly due to the assumption that categories, such as 'work' and 'production', are basically functional. Today, most of us (try to) separate work from leisure, but in pre-industrial Scandinavian society such distinctions were not so clear. The working day encompassed most of an individual's waking hours, but this period included important moments of leisure, with social action and interaction (cf. Lindblom 1944).

The households mostly consisted of a nuclear family with the addition of a farmhand and/or a maid, although it is possible that the ideal in some areas was the stem family, where it was often the case that one son was selected to take over the farmstead (Gaunt 1976, Andersson Palm 1993, particularly Appendix B, Benedictow 1993, Gaunt 1996:85-116, Andersson Palm 2001:10-12). It should also be kept in mind that prior to the social changes and population growth of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, farmhands and maids were often sons and daughters of other landed farmers in the area. Being a farmhand or a maid during part of one's youth was regarded as training for later life as a farmer or a housewife (Andersson Flygare 1997:188-189).

In traditional, Scandinavian, agrarian societies in modern times, labour division according to gender was an important principle, providing structure to daily routine behaviour. It can be assumed that female tasks were much more varied than male tasks, but were often of a repetitive character and spatially restricted to the home and the farmstead (*ibid.*:192-195). In order to discuss gender-specific labour division in the forested areas of central and northern Scandinavia during the period in question, a compilation of a number of tasks and those who undertook them has been made (see figure 1). When considering the labour division as presented in this compilation,

Task	M	F	CM	CF	SM	SF	Location
Animal husbandry (excl. horses)	(X)	X					Farmstead
Berry picking		X	X	X			Outland
Brewing		X					Farmstead/Indoor
Building	X						Farmstead/Outland
Charcoal production	X	(X)					Outland
Child rearing		X	(X)	(X)		X	Farmstead
Cleaning		X					Farmstead/Indoor
Collection of fuel		X	X	X			Outland
Collection of leaves (animal fodder)	(X)	X					Infield/Outland
Collection of moss (animal fodder)	X	X	(X)	(X)			Infield/Outland
Collection of twigs, sticks and bark (raw material)		X					Outland
Ditch digging	X						Infield/Outland
Fencing	X						Infield/Outland
Fetching water		X	X	X			Farmstead
Fishing	X						Outland
Food conservation		X					Farmstead/Indoor
Food preparation		X					Farmstead/Indoor
Handling of slaughter products		X					Farmstead
Harrowing	X	X					Infield/Outland
Harvesting with scythe	X						Infield/Outland
Harvesting with sickle		X					Infield/Outland
Haymaking with scythe	X	X					Infield/Outland
Herding		X	X	X	X		Outland
Horse rearing	X	(X)					Farmstead
Hunting	X						Outland
Laundry		X					Farmstead/Outland
Lumber work	X						Farmstead/Outland
Maintenance of implements and buildings						X	Farmstead/Outland
Metalwork (excl. smithing)	X						Farmstead
Milking		X					Farmstead/Outland
Ploughing	X						Infield/Outland
Preparation of raw materials (other than food)		X					Farmstead/Indoor
Raking at harvest		X	(X)			X	Infield/Outland
Raking at haymaking		X	(X)	(X)		X	Infield/Outland
Sharpening weapons	X						Farmstead
Shieling-related activities		X					Outland
Skin/leather work	X						Farmstead
Slaughter of large animals	X	(X)					Farmstead
Slaughter of small animals		X					Farmstead
Smithing	X						Farmstead
Soapstone handicraft (incl. quarrying)	X						Outland/Farmstead
Sowing (excl. peas, beans and flax)	X						Infield/Outland
Sowing and harvesting of flax		X					Infield
Sowing and harvesting of hemp, peas and beans	X	X					Infield
Spreading of manure	X	X					Infield
Taking care of the sick and dead, and midwifery		X					Indoor
Tar production	X						Outland
Textile production		X				X	Indoor/Outland
Threshing	X	X					Farmstead
Transport of hay, etc.	X	(X)					Infield/Farmstead/Outland

**Figure 1.** Labour division according to gender in northern Värmland in early modern times. After Emanuelsson et al. 2003, Table 8. (also Löndahl et al. 2002, Figure 2).

women appear to have performed both tasks of economic significance and worked in the outland areas at some distance from the farmstead to a greater degree than expected. In fact, traditional gender patterns were sometimes transgressed, the most important example being female herders at the shielings. Herding was an otherwise, traditionally male occupation (Szabó 1970). However, it should be emphasised that studies of labour division according to gender are politically significant and often endowed with stereotypes. The romanticised picture of the 'strong' housewife in pre-industrial, Scandinavian societies is predominant, but should be subject to critical assessment (e.g. Lövkrona 1994, Ströbeck 1999, Andersson 2000).

Another important feature of pre-industrial, rural society in Scandinavia was the yearly planning of different tasks. The working year was determined by the fixed cycle of agricultural activities, such as sowing, hay-making and harvesting. Many other tasks, however, were not so seasonally defined. In order to distribute the workload more evenly throughout the year, these tasks were slotted into the agricultural calendar wherever possible (e.g. Magnusson 1986:283).

This yearly planning may seem to be a 'natural' and therefore general phenomenon. I would, however, like to stress that this was a matter of using the resources of the established household in a way that maintained the desired social structure or organisation of the household. Presumably, the identity of the landed farmer was associated with a nuclear or stem household, in contrast to the extended households of the aristocracy (e.g. Herlihy 1985:2-3).

The strategy of yearly planning was particularly important in the forested areas of central and northern Scandinavia, where the large distances often required longer or shorter periods of absence from home. Other alternatives were to rely more on hired labour during intensive periods, or develop other household structures. For example, the Forest Finns, who were engaged in large scale slash-and-burn cultivation during early modern times in Scandinavia, periodically adopted extended households (Bladh 1995:105-109). Another way of organising work while maintaining the desired structure of the household was through task-oriented co-operatives that included several households (cf. Granlund 1944).

### **Gender-defined space (?), part 1: the farmstead**

From the presentation of labour division according to gender (see figure 1) it can be stated that women ruled indoors. This should not be confused with the assumption that the female spheres or arenas were of a private character, as the kitchen in the forested regions of northern and central Scandinavia was a public space used by the entire family and guests (Johansson 2002b:193-199). The importance of the kitchen as a centre point in the daily social life indicates that women took part in decision making within the household and local society.

In order to discuss the social space in medieval times from a gender perspective, I will here present two studies of the spatial distribution of artefacts at two settlements located in the forested areas of central Scandinavia (northern Värmland in the west of Sweden); the farm of Skinnerud (Emanuelsson *et al.* 2003) and the hamlet of

Skramle (Andersson & Svensson 2002, especially the study of the spatial distribution of artefacts in Löndahl *et al.* 2002). Both have been excavated during the last ten years. Skramle has been completely excavated, whereas most of the presumed settlement area at Skinnerud has been excavated.

It should be pointed out that the forest farmers both at Skramle and at Skinnerud were involved in the exploitation of outland resources, producing goods for sale on an external market. The degree of 'market economy' (in this context meaning that goods were produced for retail, that a certain amount of goods were bought and that the farmers were by no means self-sufficient) and 'market involvement' were however somewhat different. The forest farmers at Skinnerud appear to have been completely adjusted to the external market, specialising in producing goods for sale to such an extent that agricultural production diminished even during periods of population growth. The forest farmers of Skramle appear to have balanced more between self-sufficiency and market production.

In previous examinations of the spatial distribution of artefacts at these two sites, all artefacts, divided into functional groups, have been analysed (Emanuelsson *et al.* 2003, Löndahl *et al.* 2002). However, it shall be made clear that few straightforward patterns emerged in these analyses. This problem has also occurred with other studies of social space through the analysis of the spatial distribution of artefacts (e.g. Mulik 1994:211-221), and it is clear that such methods of working with this material need to be refined, evaluated and discussed.

Here, I will present some of the results from these studies that concern gender-defined social space with focus on the category of 'work'. Due to the character of the material, this study is primarily based on remains of the physical performance of various tasks. According to ethno-archaeological studies, it is clear that ritual elements were integrated with the physical performance of, in particular, iron production (Collett 1993, Reid & MacLean 1995, Barndon, this volume). Strangely enough, ritual seems to be more integrated in traditionally male than female tasks. For example, I have not encountered any evidence of rituals performed to ensure good cooking.

Skinnerud was a secondary unit of the hamlet of Backa, and was inhabited during the tenth to thirteenth centuries. It was presumably inhabited by a nuclear family, possibly with the addition of a farmhand and/or maid. Skinnerud was a single farmstead consisting of at least a hall (without a hearth) probably also used for dwelling during warmer periods of the year (HI), a cooking house, used also for dwelling during colder periods of the year (HII), a possible cattle byre (HIV) and another outhouse (HIII). Fossil field layers (superimposed by today's fields) were also identified, together with a large quantity of iron slag. The actual smithy was not located, but was presumably located by the river, some distance from the steading, as indicated by the distribution of slag.

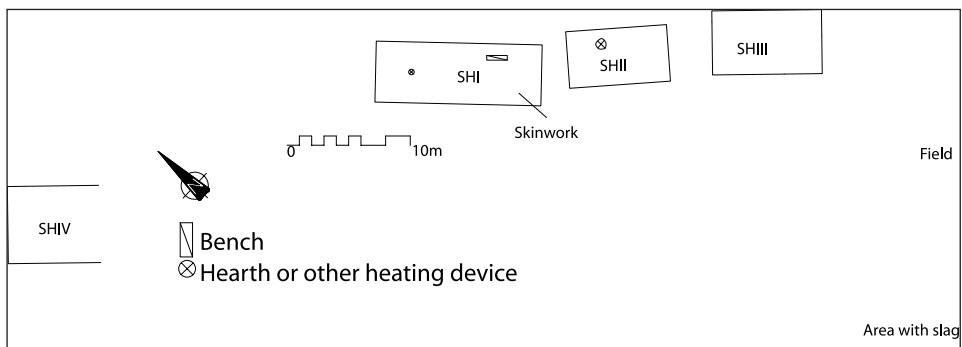
Most of the artefacts were located in the hall, and as these artefacts were of a varied character a reasonable interpretation is that most of the daily routine activity was conducted in this building. As there was a heating pit in the hall, the building

was probably also used during colder periods of the year for certain activities. Fewer artefacts were found in the cooking house and only a small number in the possible cattle byre and the outhouse.

The spatial distribution of artefacts gave few clues to specific activity or working areas, as there were few concentrations of artefacts representing the same function. Also, there was seldom a good spatial fit between a specific structure and artefacts presumably used in connection with it. For example, the artefacts associated with housekeeping and cooking were located in the hall and not in the cooking house. The general impression acquired through the analysis of the spatial distribution of artefacts is rather that there were few areas allocated to specific tasks, and that most activities were carried out in a spatially random sense. Another impression is that there were few, if any, restrictions on the movements of men and women at the farmstead. Rather, the social space at Skinnerud appears to have been gender-mixed, a state of affairs enforced by the importance of the indoor space.

There is only one concentration of artefacts that is of interest here. It appears that skin and leather working was carried out in and around the southern corner of the hall. The existence of skin and leather working is interesting as it alludes to the name of the farm; 'Skinn' meaning 'skin' in Swedish. It is also interesting because it seems reasonable to believe that the raw material for the skin and leather working came from the outland of the farm, thus connecting the home farm and the outland – which is rarely an easy connection to establish. The same connection can also be established through the association of the smithy at the farmstead and the bloomery furnace sites in the outland.

Smithing, together with skin and leather production, was most probably carried out for retail purposes. Both tasks, together with hunting in the outland areas, were likely to have been conducted by men, at least according to modern local parallels (Kulturkoppra 1999:72). Other occupations that, judging from the recognisable constructions, appear to have been carried out are cereal cultivation, food processing and cooking, milking and tending to cattle. These were, apart from cereal cultivation, presumably female tasks. Work on the infield area is likely to have been carried out by both men and women. Strangely enough, no trace of textile production has been encountered.

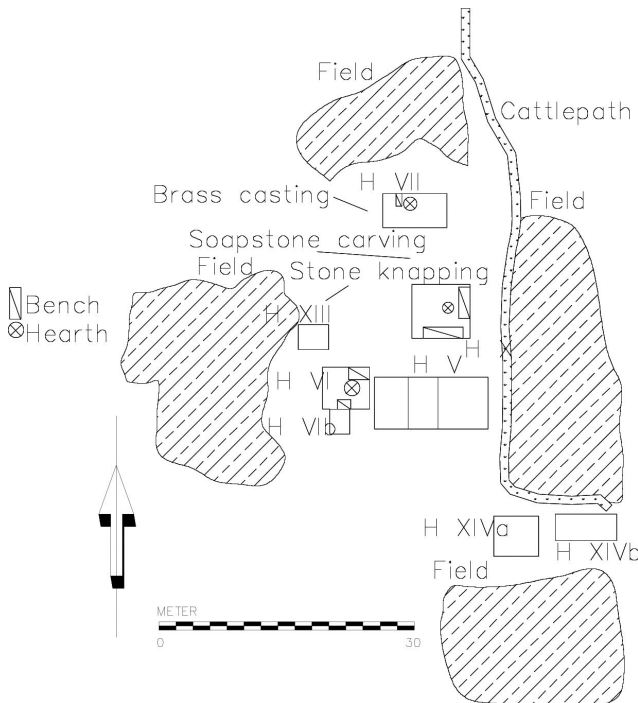


**Figure 2.** Skinnerud. Buildings and activities. A hall (HI), a cooking house (HII), an outhouse (HIII) and a cattle byre (HIV). The full extent of the fields is unknown.

The spatial organisation of the discussed activities does not appear to relate to a social space characterised by gender division. Smithing, cooking and food processing, milking and tending to cattle, took place in specially constructed buildings and in the outland, while skin and leather working was conducted in the hall. The individual buildings, apart from the smithy, were clearly used by both men and women according to the general pattern of artefact distribution.

At the site of Skramle several phases of settlement, dating from the sixth to the early sixteenth centuries, were detected during excavation. Here, I will focus on the period *ca.* AD 1250-1300. There were three households or steadings at Skramle during this period. These had been reduced to two by AD 1300. The households appear to have been production units consisting of nuclear families. The individual farmsteads consisted of fairly small dwelling houses (H VI, H VII, H X) together with individual fields, and part ownership in common outhouses, such as a barn (H XIVa), a cattle byre (H XIVb) and two outhouses with unclear functions (H V, H XIII). There was also a smithy (H VIb), which formed a part of the dwelling house, H VI.

Analysis of the spatial distribution of artefacts and structures showed that the majority of activities took place in the dwelling houses, as there were clear concentrations of artefacts within these buildings. A wide variety of artefacts were located, suggesting that all members of the household occupied these houses on a regular basis. However, when looking at artefacts associated with work, another pattern appeared. Most of the presumably female tasks, such as textile production, food processing and cooking, were carried out in the dwelling houses. An important exception from this



was milking and tending to cattle and other animals (apart from horses), which took place in the cattle byre and in the outland. The presumably male tasks, such as smithing, other metal working, stone knapping and soapstone carving, were instead conducted outdoors or in a specific building. Hunting, most likely carried out by men, was performed in the outland. The additional

**Figure 3.** Skramle *ca.* AD 1250-1300. Houses and activities. Dwelling houses (H VI, H VII, H X), a smithy (H VIb), outhouses (H V, H XIII), a barn (H XIVa) and a cattle byre (H XIVb).

processing of furs and hides was carried out by women, or maybe by men, in or around the dwelling houses. Both men and women were presumably involved in working the infield areas. Cereal cultivation appears to have been the concern of the individual households.

Female tasks were of a repetitive nature and presumably, judging from the scarcity of artefacts located, aimed at consumption within the household. Female activities were carried out in all the dwelling houses, indicating that the separate households were self-sufficient with regard to textile production and food. The female occupations, together with working of the infield areas, thus constituted the households at Skramle.

The male tasks, on the other hand, were more commercially oriented, including some production for sale beyond the hamlet – primarily soapstone products. Only one working area has been identified for each of the above-listed, male occupations, suggesting that some form of co-operation or labour division existed between the men of the three different households. The male work, together with cattle breeding and the outhouses, thus constituted the hamlet and its working co-operative.

It is hard to detect any restrictions in the movements of men and women at the farmstead, apart from perhaps the smithy. The existence of special working areas does not mean that these were inaccessible for non-workers, especially if they were located outdoors. It seems that the social space at Skramle was, like that at Skinnerud, also mixed gender, especially – or at least – the indoor space.

There were a greater number of activities, and thus more gender-specific areas, identified at Skramle than at Skinnerud. This should not be interpreted as a structural change reflecting the development of a more diversified economy at the younger settlement, Skramle. I believe that this situation was rather the result of the farmers at Skramle being more self-sufficient within the hamlet than the farmers at Skinnerud, who were almost completely adjusted to a market oriented economy.

According to the general picture provided by the spatial distribution of artefacts at Skramle and Skinnerud, there were few, or no, access restrictions based on gender (nor on social status, but that has not been discussed here). It is also possible to say that the majority of activities were carried out indoors in a gender mixed environment. These results are in accordance with the suggestion presented above that kitchens were important meeting places within societies (presumably outland-using) living in the forested areas of central and northern Scandinavia in modern times (Johansson 2002b:193-199). It can be discussed whether the importance of the kitchens as the social nuclei of settlements was restricted only to the central and northern part of Scandinavia. In fact, an investigation of the spatial distribution of artefacts at a medieval farmstead in Skåne, in southern Scandinavia, indicates similar conditions (Schmidt Sabo 2001:67-74).



## **Gender-defined space (?), part 2: the outland**

In small-scale societies with a high proportion of outland use, members of the households were often required to stay away from home during longer or shorter periods of time. In modern times, also women spent a great deal of time in the distant outland areas and stayed away from the home farm for long periods. According to the spatial distribution of ancient monuments and other indications of different land and outland use, this was also the case in earlier periods. An interesting example from eastern Norway can be used to illustrate this point.

At Rødsmoen in eastern Norway, large-scale rescue archaeology has been carried out on a detailed level in the outland areas. Among the most interesting sites located were a number of terraced fields on a slope in a pine forest, i.e. in an environment where cultivation features were hardly to be expected. There were problems dating the terraces, but available radiocarbon determinations and other observations indicate that they were in use from *ca.* AD 200-400 (or earlier). Interestingly enough, flax and various cereals were cultivated on these terraces (Holm Sørensen 1997). Flax was traditionally a 'female crop' product, from sowing to harvesting. Quite close to these terraces, a small grave monument to a woman was located, dated to *ca.* AD 570-670 (Bergstøl 1997:63-69). It should be pointed out that the ethnicity of the deceased woman is debated. For discussion see Bergstøl 1997:83-92, Bergstøl, this volume.

The ancient monuments and other traces of outland use surveyed in the outland areas of Skramle and Backa-Skinnerud are of a more ordinary character. In fact, only a shieling and a stone quarry have been identified on the presumed outland areas of Skramle. On the other hand, some kind of labour division or specialisation concerning outland use appears to have been practised within the parish and local society of Gunnarskog, where Skramle was located. It seems that some farms specialised in pitfalls for elk, others in iron production, etc. (Svensson 1998, Svensson 2002).

At Skramle, soapstone products were made for retail, most likely on the local market. The soapstone was quarried at the quarry located in the outland of Bosebyn in the southeastern part of Gunnarskog. It is unknown how the farmers of Skramle acquired their soapstone, but most likely the quarrying of soapstone and associated handicraft were aspects of the local economy of Gunnarskog.

According to the artefact assemblage, the farmers of Skramle practised hunting for furs and for meat, as well as soapstone handicraft and the use of a shieling. Soapstone handicraft and hunting appear to have been male tasks, while running a shieling, together with milking and herding, was a female task.

Compared with Skramle's outland, that of Backa/Skinnerud is very much richer in ancient monuments, although survey work is still incomplete. The registered ancient monuments include pitfalls for elk, bloomery furnace sites, a shieling and mires, where haymaking, grazing and cereal cultivation have been detected through pollen analysis. It is likely that other mires that were used in the same way exist, but have not yet been investigated. From existing dating evidence it is known, or in some cases presumed, that the bloomery furnace sites with charcoal pits and some of

the pitfalls for elk were used contemporaneously with the settlement at Skinnerud. Cattle grazing at the four investigated mires and cultivation at one of these mires (Stakällsmyren) were practised, but the shieling of Backasättern, established *ca.* AD 650, was probably deserted during this period.



**Figure 4.** The outland of Backa/Skinnerud with ancient monuments connected with outland use and mires investigated through pollen analysis. M=Multmyrarna, B=Blötmyren, S=Stakällsmyren, T=Tittbäcksmýren. Based on Emanuelsson et al. 2003, Figs. 31, 33).

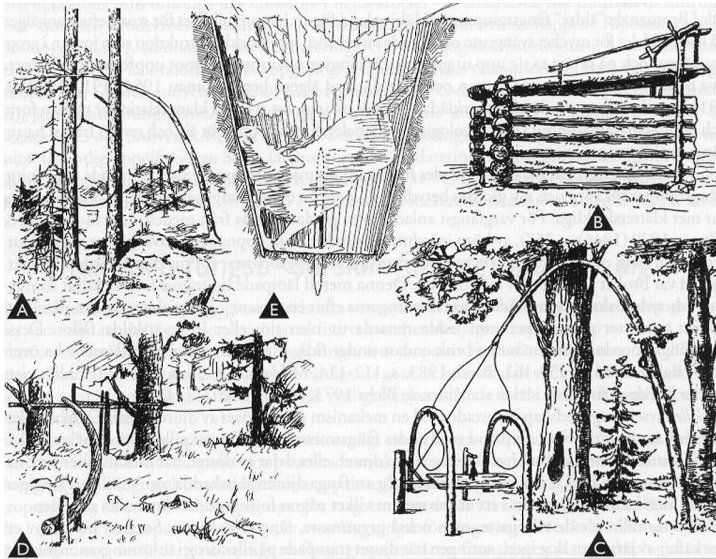
Hunting, use of pitfalls and charcoal production were male tasks, and bloomery furnace iron production was a predominantly male occupation. Herding and tending to the cattle were female tasks. Both men and women practised cereal cultivation. From the artefact assemblage at Skinnerud it can also be stated that hunting for skins was practised by men in the outland.

The outland seems to have been used by both men and women without any apparent access restrictions on either group. However, it is striking that outland use as practised by men left visible traces (ancient monuments) in the landscape, whereas the female activities rarely did so. I have not examined the case for a similar situation concerning land use in other areas (such as lowland agricultural areas).

### Visible men and invisible women

According to the spatial distribution of artefacts observed from archaeological excavation, a mixed gender social space characterised the settlements of Skramle and Skinnerud. The importance of the dwelling houses, including the hall and the cooking house at Skinnerud, as female work places and general places of assembly should have promoted the fact that women played an important role in the strategic decision making in these households.

The outland also appears to have been a mixed gender landscape. However, the human landscape acquired its physical structure through male activities, which resulted in constructions such as pitfalls for elk and charcoal pits. These sites are still visible in the landscape and are therefore included in the survey of ancient monuments and protected by law. Although constructions such as pitfalls and charcoal pits were functional, I propose that their very monumentality was intentional. There are a variety of ways of trapping elk and other wild game that were not monumental in scale and have left no traces in the landscape (figure 5). There are also other ways of making charcoal that leave less visible traces than making it in a pit. For example, charcoal could be made in a bloomery furnace or in a charcoal stack, methods often used during periods when bloomery iron had a lower commercial value and was produced primarily for home consumption.



**Figure 5.** Some trapping devices. A. Elk-snare, B. Booth, C. Bear- or wolf-snare, D. Triggered spear. E. Pitfall for elk. After Svensson 1998, figure 15, and originals detailed in the caption. F. Deserted pitfall for elk in the landscape.



**Figure 6.** Butterwort, *pinguicula vulgaris*. After Launert et al. 1983:155.

It is suggested that women living in the forested areas of central and northern Scandinavia during the Iron Age and medieval times had a greater degree of social equality than those living in southern Scandinavia (e.g. Rathje 2001). However, I believe that our fragmented empirical material relating to outland use during this period is (at least partly) due to gender inequality, both in the construction and the documentation of the cultural landscapes of the outland. If we want to know more about female tasks in the outland, it is necessary to take in new empirical material and develop new methods of analysis. One example is the collection and use of plants and herbs, such as butterwort (figure 6), which has a variety of medical applications, as well as being used in the manufacture of soured milk (Sw. *filmjök*) (Svanberg 1998:316).

It is possible that women living in the forested areas of central and northern Scandinavia during the Iron Age and Middle Ages had a greater degree of social equality than those living in southern Scandinavia, but I believe that it is important to emphasise that the male-female roles were far from equal. On the contrary, male domination and female subordination were ever-present features of daily life (see also Andersson 2000).

## Summary

In this article, I have attempted to investigate the gender-defined social space at two settlements, together with their outland, during the late Viking period and early Middle Ages. The social space at these settlements is studied mainly through the spatial distribution of artefacts and constructions that can be related to the social category, 'work'. The conclusions drawn for the outland areas are based on visible monuments and other physical remains related to outland use.

The social space at the settlement sites and within the outland areas appears to have been mixed gender. However, the female tasks at the settlements were of a more repetitive character and intended for production within the household proper, whereas the male occupations more often involved producing goods for retail. It is also clear that it was the male tasks that gave a physical structure to the landscape of the outland, as these activities often included creating visible monuments in the landscape. The female tasks left less visible traces. It can therefore be concluded that male domination and female subordination dominated the social arenas of outland users in the forested areas of central Scandinavia.

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