

# Landsjö and Stensjö Castles, Östergötland, Sweden. An interim report on the results of the 2014 excavation season.

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## Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel berichtet über Ausgrabungen im Jahr 2014 in den Ruinen von zwei kleinen mittelalterlichen Burgen in der Nähe der Stadt Norrköping am Südschwedens Ostseeküste.

Bei Landsjö verfälscht wir unsere Hypothese, dass die Ringmauer hätte eine östliche Teil entlang dem oberen Rand der steilen Böschung gehabt. Aber wir fanden die südliche Begrenzungsmauer der Hochburg, zusammen mit einem Südostturm errichtet, und wir erklärten die Form der Vorburg. Wir fanden Reste einer Brücke über den Quer trockenen Graben zu die Vorburg. Und fünf Münzen datieren die Errichtung des Burgs um 1250-1275, was innerhalb der Lebensdauer Landsjös erste dokumentierte Besitzerin, Kristina Fastadotter, ist. Eine Münze dokumentiert auch unerwartet eine Verwendung des Südostturms des Hochburg etwa 1360.

Bei Stensjö haben wir unsere Hypothesen bestätigt, dass a) die nördliche Ruinhügel representiert einen zweiten Turm, dass b) es war geplant und in der gleichen Expansionsphase als der Ringmauer gebaut, und c) die Ringmauer hatte wirklich ein westlichen Teil und ging ringsum den Burg. Mehr unerwartet fanden wir reichlich Beweise für die Nachmittelalterliche Nutzung der Platz, in Form einem ziemlich grosse Gebäudefundament innerhalb der Burg.

## Introduction

The castle ruins of Landsjö and Stensjö are located 40 km apart, to either side of the city of Norrköping in Östergötland province, on the Baltic coast of southern Sweden. They have much in common. They are the only two sites in this fertile and castle-studded province that are known to have been both privately owned *and* equipped with perimeter walls. This indicates good relations between the owners and the Crown, which as a rule did not take kindly to uncontrolled crenellation. Their first documented owners, in c. 1280 and 1369 respectively, were close relatives, one being the great-grandmother of the other. Both castles have been severely truncated by post-Medieval removal of building stone for re-use. And, finally, neither had seen any documented archaeological excavations prior to the summer of 2014.

Christian Lovén and I planned that year's fieldwork together, each asking a particular kind of questions in a two-sided approach that will be familiar to castellologists. Lovén established the current overall base of investigations into castles within Sweden's Medieval borders in his 1999 book, and he focuses on the architecture. I am a prehistorian and focus on questions of stratigraphy, culture layers and lifestyle. With this double agenda in mind, I brought a shifting team of 4-7 Umeå students and we excavated for two weeks at either site. University of Cambridge PhD candidate Ethan Aines acted throughout as a very able second-in-command.

In the following I shall recount our main results. The term *greystone* denotes local gneiss and granite, following the Swedish use of the word *gråsten*.

## Landsjö

Landsjö Castle occupies a high rocky islet in a small inland lake between Norrköping and Linköping. Standing but poorly preserved masonry above the western shore of the little isle reveals a perimeter wall measuring c. 60 m between the preserved NW and SW corners (figs 1–2; Lovén 1999). The first textual evidence for the farmstead is found in the will of Kristina Fastadotter of the Plant family, dating from about 1280 (*Dipl. Suec.* 855 = SDHK 762). Lady Kristina styles herself “of Landsjö”, meaning that this was her manorial seat. Being the widow of Folke jarl's son Lord

Holmger, she belonged to Sweden's top-level nobility. The castle was probably in place in 1280. But already in 1325–1350, however, Landsjö is documented as a tenant farm. This suggests that the castle was no longer inhabited or kept in defensible shape at that time.

#### *The high inner bailey and the steep outer bailey: trench C*

The area within the visible perimeter wall is divided into a flat high plateau in the northern half and a steep slope in the southern half. A linear W-E terrace marks the lip of the slope, and we laid out a 4 x 3 m trench across it guided partly by where trees would allow us to dig. We found that the terrace visible on the surface is caused by the remains of a W-E wall marking the southern boundary of the high inner bailey (fig. 3). It is 1.2 m thick and built of greystone on the shell principle. Hardly any brick was found in the rubble here.

From this wall's northern face extends an identical N-S wall whose core is laid down in the same building phase, the two walls being of one piece. Abundant wall plaster in the rubble and surviving in situ on the W face of the N-S wall shows that it belongs to a plaster-facaded building. A marked depression surrounded by banks in the ground surface east of trench C suggests that the trench was placed on the SW corner of a square 7 x 7 m building forming the SE corner of the inner bailey's defences. The interior floor space of the building can be guessed at:  $(7-2*1.2)^2 = 21$  sqm. Only 2 sqm of the building's interior were in trench C. One of the two discernible floor layers on the natural here yielded a coin of King Magnus Eriksson c. 1354–63 (a radiance ring bracteate, Lagerqvist 1970 type XXVIII:B:4a; Golabiewski Lannby 1983). This is surprising as no presence of the nobility or a garrison is known at Landsjö at that late date.

#### *The eastern reach of the perimeter wall: trenches A, B and C*

East of the inner bailey's putative SE corner tower is a steep drop, and so we could assume that any eastern reach of the perimeter wall would link up with the tower from the N and S. Trenches A and B were laid out to seek the inner bailey's missing eastern wall.

The irregular 9 sqm trench A was placed to seek a NE corner of the perimeter wall. We put it here because of brick and mortar that had been pushed to the surface by a young oak tree on a wide ledge above a precipitous drop. We found brick and greystone rubble and a nail, but no in situ masonry. Fire damage to the underlying bedrock, burnt bones, charcoal fragments and two pieces of vitrified brick show that an intense fire had burned here. The materials looked like dumped demolition debris and meal remains that had been moved to the ledge and set on fire.

The 5 x 1.5 m trench B was laid out to seek the missing eastern reach of the inner bailey's perimeter wall. Though full of brick and greystone rubble in its western part, the trench showed no sign of any in situ masonry or wall foundation trench. The small finds were bones, knapped quartz, a small slate whetstone and a piece of modern window glass. E of the trench is a high, almost vertical drop that is impossible to scale without a rope and grappling hook. Was this considered defence enough? That would follow the manner of the area's mid-1st millennium hillforts, whose drystone walls usually only defend the easy ascents of a hill. Given the location of the inner bailey's SE corner tower at trench C, and considering the absence of any wall in trench A, it seems inevitable that any eastern reach of the perimeter wall would have passed through trench B unless the architect were willing to leave a wide level shelf along the outside of the wall.

#### *The southern reach of the perimeter wall: trench D*

The western reach of the perimeter wall is straight and ends at a nearly right angles at either end. It is nevertheless clear from the topography that the perimeter cannot have formed a rectangle. The preserved southern reach measures 10 m and ends in rubble. We made two important observations about it.

Firstly, in the middle of the southern reach there are remains of a southward protrusion measuring 2.2 m in width. Its core is of a piece with the southern reach. This protrusion seems to have been a bridge or drawbridge across the transversal dry moat, which would mean that the entrance into the outer bailey was a gate in the ruined upper part of the southern reach of the

perimeter wall. Such a layout would suggest that the great rubble pile south of the dry moat conceals the remains of a gate house.

Secondly, the 2 x 2 m trench D contained no eastward continuation of the southern reach despite being placed on the projected line of its wall face and with the easternmost visible fallen stone from the wall rubble inside its edges. All major stones inside the trench had fallen into it from the W. Nor was there any pavement or threshold in the trench to indicate a gate here. This suggests that the current eastern end of the perimeter wall's southern reach is actually a corner, from which the wall continued up slope either in parallel with the western reach or diagonally NNE to the tower at trench C.

Trench D offered interesting stratigraphy and finds. The current steep slope is a talus or scree consisting of dark loamy colluvial soil. It includes the rubble from the perimeter wall and sits on a much more level surface of yellow moraine soil, deposited in two distinct phases and mixed with animal bones (which are undergoing analysis). We found seven large sheet-iron carpentry staples in the upper part of the yellow layer. And in its lower part, we found five identical silver coins: Crowned Lion bracteates struck for King Valdemar Birgersson in 1250–75 (Larsson 1970 group XVII:B). Midway down the depth of the yellow layer, we found a single sherd of fine German stoneware with a burgundy manganese slip inside and out, which is likely of similar date. This layer sits on the natural. Given what we know of castle building trends over time in the region (Lovén 1999), and given that Landsjö's first documented owner, Lady Kristina, was an old woman about 1280, the yellow layer with the coins and potsherd is likely to represent the castle's original construction phase or early use.

#### *The dry moat: tree throw E*

At the W end of the dry moat near the putative Medieval shoreline is a tree throw. Taking inspiration from Stone Age settlement surveying methodology, we metal-detected and screened the disturbed earth in and around it. It was dark, loamy and full of gravel. We found a tiny iron annular brooch and a few nails and bones, but not the abundant household refuse we hoped for at this end-of-moat location.

#### *Post-Medieval use of the site*

In 1630, Landsjö again became a seat of the nobility when Johan Fegraeus (Strömfelt) was granted *säteri* tax exemption for the property. One of the conditions for such privileges was that the property owner build a suitably representative manor house. The current mainland site of Landsjö manor (whose use prior to 1630 is unknown) now saw major construction work, which would have begun the era of intensive quarrying for building materials on the castle islet in the nearby lake. The terrace walls in the manor park consist of the same kind of dressed orange-brownish greystone ashlar as the castle ruin's remaining wall facings.

A 1730 map of the manor has three building symbols on the castle islet: a smallholding at the north end, a ruin in the middle of the island, and a non-inhabited building at the south-west shore. The sherd of thin window glass that we found in trench B probably originates with the smallholding. The current vegetation on the island has a strong component of modern-era garden plant species that grow well on the calcareous rubble, including redcurrant bushes and enormous sourcherry trees.

#### **Stensö**

Stensö Castle is on a hilltop with a good view of the Bråviken inlet, in an offensive position guarding a major shipping lane. Standing masonry indicates that it began life as a free-standing *kastal*-type defensive tower, a kind of structure typically dating from the decades about AD 1200 (Olsson 1932; Lovén 1999:437). The abutment of the perimeter wall's eastern range against this tower shows that the wall was added at a later date, along with (we now know) a northern tower (fig. 4). These additions were made no later than 1480, by which time Stensö was a tenant farm. The earliest textual evidence for the farmstead is from 1369, when Stensö seems to have been the

seat of Holmger Torkelsson of the Boat family and his wife Sigrid Karlsdotter of the Stubbe family, a recently married couple in Sweden's top-level nobility (*Dipl. Suec.* 6108 & SDHK 7573). Lord Holmger's maternal grandfather Ulf Holmgerson was the son of Lady Kristina of Stensö, mentioned above.

#### *The northern tower and the perimeter wall: trench A*

Only the eastern reach of the perimeter wall survives above ground at Stensö. It enters the ruin mound of the northern tower from the east but does not exit again on its south-western side. Nor is there any sign of how the western reach of the wall linked up to the original southern *kastal* tower. One main aim of our fieldwork was to seek the missing wall reach.

Opening a 3 x 4 m trench (A) on the southern flank of the northern tower's ruin mound, we found a well-preserved greystone wall face showing that the tower is round (fig. 5). Judging from the distance from this wall face to the centre of the central depression on the ruin mound's apex, the tower's diameter is about 5.5 m. The wall's thickness remains unknown as we did not excavate inside the tower. Neither the standing wall nor the rubble we removed contained any brick, though all was covered with white calcium residue from the mortar.

The tower wall survives to a height of 2.15 m above the surrounding flat ground. Out of the tower wall projects a torn-down remnant of the castle's missing western perimeter wall, consisting mainly of greystone wall core but also with a few surviving facing stones on either side. Its thickness is 2.30 m. The fact that the western reach of the perimeter wall is entirely invisible above ground today suggests that it may have been torn down in a directed effort to disarm Stensö castle as a strongly defended site.

The tower wall's core and the western perimeter wall's core are of a piece, with an opening in the facing of the tower wall to let the perimeter wall through. This means that the northern tower and the perimeter wall were designed and built at the same time. The rediscovered stump of the perimeter wall is orientated south-west (236°) and does not enter the northern tower on a radial line, but considerably to the east of this radial line, giving the northern tower a strongly flanking relationship to the western perimeter wall. Nor does the wall stump point at any part of the southern tower. This means that in order to close the loop around the castle bailey, the western wall must have been curved and/or angled just like the surviving eastern one. Looking meanwhile at the eastern perimeter wall's relationship to the northern tower, it links up almost at an outside tangent, offering no flanking whatsoever. Here the topography is steep and there was no real risk of attack.

We removed only rubble from trench A and it yielded no small finds.

#### *Inside the western perimeter wall: trench B*

We laid out the 2 x 1.5 m trench B between the two towers to seek the western perimeter wall's remains, but before trench A had given us any idea of where to look. As it turned out we missed the wall and the trench ended up inside the bailey. It was filled with stones of typically c. 30 cm size to a depth of 110 cm, where we reached bedrock and patches of yellow moraine all over the trench. There was no mortar and not many brick fragments in the trench and the stones did not have the tell-tale calcium coating of the stones in the rubble from the north tower. Among the stones in trench B were numerous air pockets and brown loamy soil with many animal bones (currently undergoing osteological analysis). One fine dating find surfaced, at over 60 cm depth: a 13th century droplet-shaped silver brooch with blue glass inlay (fig. 6).

The interpretation of our observations in this trench is not straight-forward. My suggestion is that the stones were carted to site and deposited with household refuse to raise and level the new bailey while or after the perimeter wall was built.

#### *The fall of the castle and post-Medieval use of the site: trench C*

This 3 x 3 m trench was laid out against the inside of the south-eastern perimeter wall, in a low-lying part of the bailey where Claes Ternström (1997) had measured an elevated phosphate concentration. Our aims were to seek Medieval household refuse and investigate a rectangular stone

building foundation partly visible above the turf. As it turned out, the trench contained brick fragments, interpreted as erosion material from a now-lost upper brick masonry part of the perimeter wall, all the way from the turf down to the natural. The only intact bricks were ones that had been re-fired at high temperature and vitrified, causing them to turn a glossy burgundy red and swell up like rising bread dough. This suggests that Stensö castle, like so many of its contemporaries, met its end in a devastating fire. The median dimensions of the unmodified brick fragments I could measure were width 130 mm (n=18) and height 80 mm (n=28). I could measure the length of only one brick: 270 mm.

The building foundation (fig. 7) sat interleaved in this brick rubble and so its use period dates from after the brick parts of the perimeter wall began to erode but before the last bricks had fallen down. Indeed, the foundation seems to have been *laid on top of* a re-used greystone facing stone from the wall, to *consist itself of* such stones, and was certainly *sealed by* a very large fallen greystone ashlar in the rubble.

The finds cannot elucidate the building's use, though the trench yielded many bones, a number of iron nails and one small piece of Early Modern red pottery with both faces glazed. A *marleka* calcium carbonate concretion disc, that is a geofact clearly collected from elsewhere, was found deposited next to the outside of one of the building foundation stones in the wall-line crossing the trench. This looks a lot like a foundation deposit of a kind known e.g. from the Åkroken site in Nyköping, where little *marleka* hoards were found deposited beneath Medieval building foundations (pers. comm. Lars Norberg, July 2014). However, we made no datable Medieval finds in trench C. Current vegetation around the castle ruin includes quite a lot of cultivated tree and bush species, suggesting that people have lived there at some point in more recent centuries.

### **Summary: main findings**

At Landsjö we falsified our hypothesis that the perimeter wall would have had an eastern range along the top of the steep scarp. But we found the southern delimiting wall of the inner northern bailey, erected together with a south-east tower, and we clarified the shape of the outer southern bailey. We found remains of a bridge across the transversal dry moat into the outer bailey. And five coins date the erection of the castle to 1250–75, which is within the lifetime of Landsjö's first documented owner, Kristina Fastadotter. Unexpectedly, one coin also documents use of the inner bailey's south-east tower about 1360.

At Stensö we confirmed our hypotheses that a) the northern ruin mound does represent a second tower, that b) it was planned and built in the same expansion phase as the perimeter wall, and c) the perimeter wall had a western range and did form a closed loop around the bailey. More unexpectedly, we found abundant evidence for post-Medieval use of the site, in the form of a sizeable building foundation inside the bailey.

### **References**

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**Figure captions**

1. Plan of Landsjö castle after Lovén 1999, with 2014 trenches indicated.
2. The best-preserved section of Landsjö's perimeter wall, at the SW corner. Photo author.
3. The recently discovered southern wall of Landsjö's high inner bailey in trench C. Photo author.
4. Plan of Stensö castle after Lovén 1999, with 2014 trenches indicated.
5. Stensö's recently discovered northern tower in trench A. Photo author.
6. 13th century silver-and-glass brooch found in trench B at Stensö. Photo Carola Bohm.
7. Early Modern house foundation in trench C at Stensö. Stereo photogrammetry Ethan Aines.