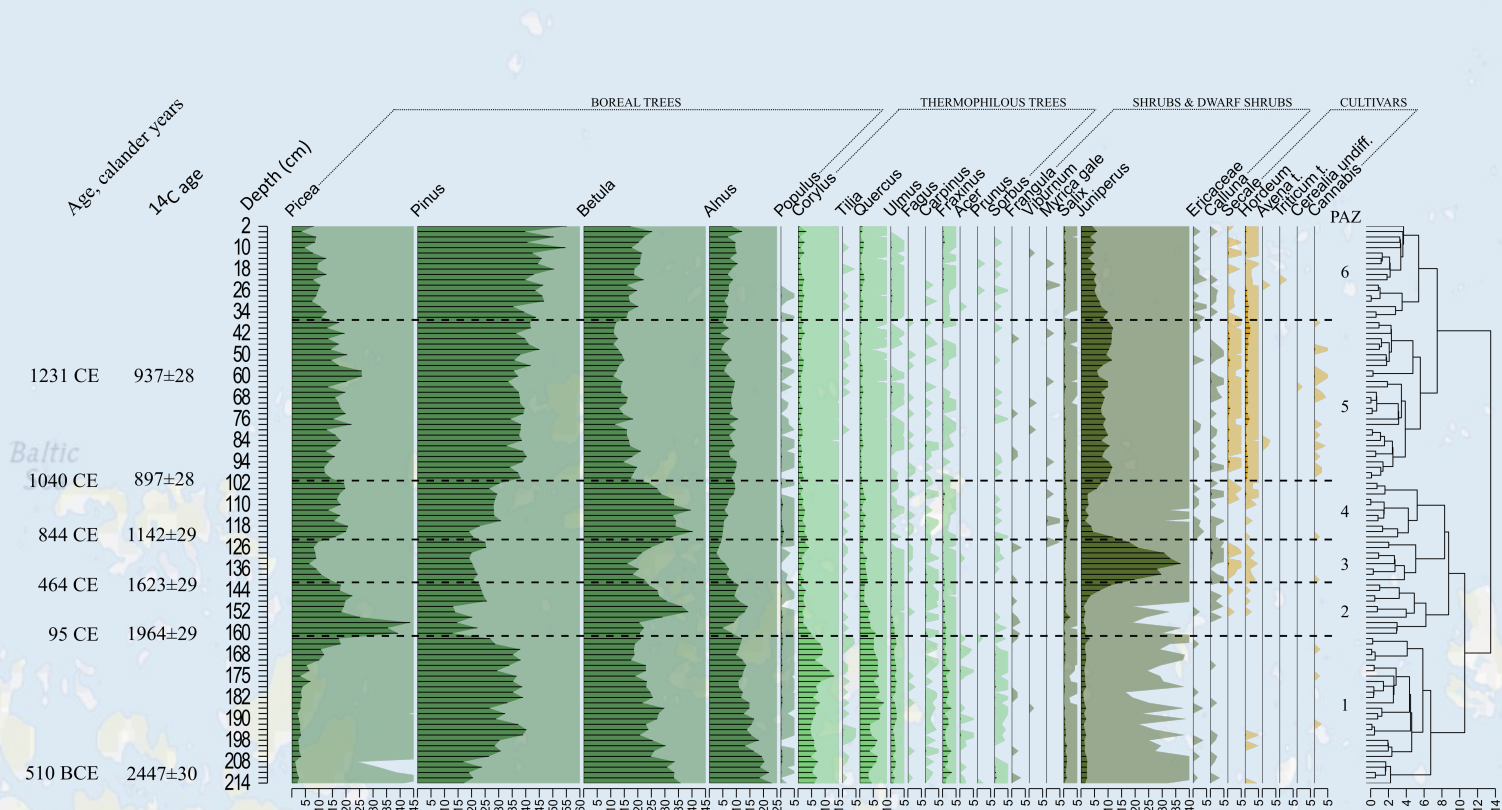


# Witnessing demographic movement through palynology

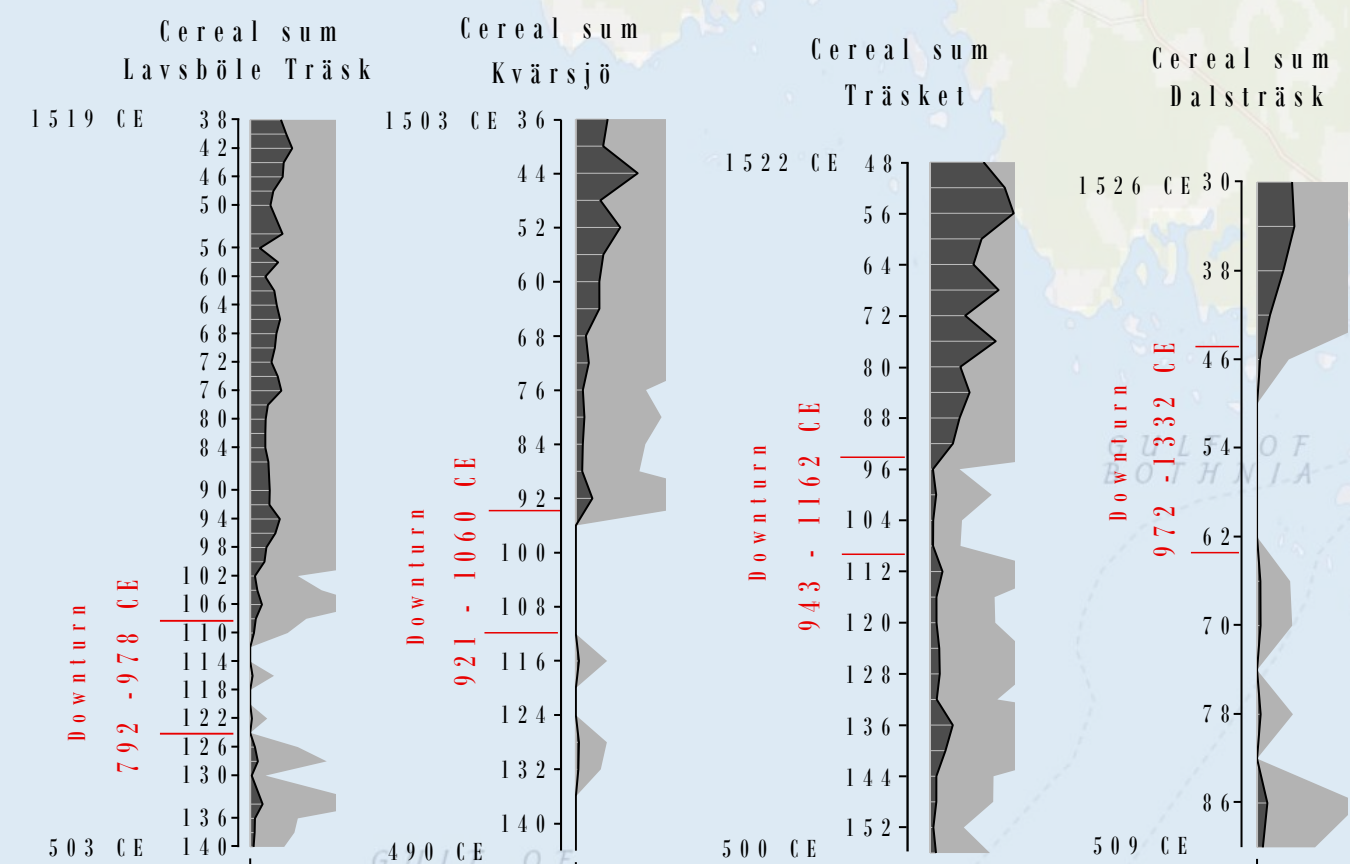
Petter I. Larsson

Archaeological evidence from Åland reveals a significant population increase during the Late Iron Age (c. 550 - 1050 CE), contrasting sharply with the Early Iron Age (c. 500 BCE - 550 CE), which left minimal traces in the landscape. Approximately 450 cemeteries containing nearly 11,000 grave mounds and around 90 settlement areas from the Late Iron Age have been identified. Recent palynological studies reinforce this picture, showing pollen evidence of increased anthropogenic land use during this period. The presence of cereal pollen from barley and rye, and coprophilous spores confirm domesticated grazing. This intensified land use led to deforestation and significant human impact on the landscape and vegetation.



Fotos: Kristin Ilves

During the Viking Age (c. 750 - 1050 CE), pollen signals indicate a decline in anthropogenic land use, especially in cereal cultivation. Despite this reduction, evidence of grazing suggests some ongoing human activity, reflecting a shift in subsistence strategies. Archaeological findings and signs of small-scale land use point to a continued, though smaller, population on Åland. Concurrently, trade patterns shifted in the Baltic Sea region, with Åland typical clay paws appearing in new settlements in northeastern Russia. This, along with changing subsistence practices on Åland suggests a possible eastward migration.



Percentage of cereal type pollen summarised.

A smaller population on the islands likely favoured less labour-intensive activities, such as animal husbandry and the use of maritime resources, over cereal cultivation.

By the medieval period (c. 1050 - 1520 CE), agriculture on Åland intensified again, with both cereal cultivation and animal husbandry re-emerging - potentially driven by the expanding Swedish Empire. Overall, palynological data provide insights into demographic changes, highlighting shifts in land use practices linked to population fluctuations.

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