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Foreword

by Sofie Laurine Albris

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It is with great pride that I write this foreword welcoming readers to the first edition of this new student journal.

The title *Curious Things* is inspired by Early Modern curiosity cabinets, which held prestigious collections of rare and bizarre objects. But this journal is about more than just the odd and special: By publishing original student research across disciplines occupied with material culture studies, the journal captures a spirit of curiosity and inquiry that is essential to breaking new ground in science. Material culture, bridging the study of the deep human past with our very present, is a field of study where new angles and perspectives hold immense possibilities. This is why student research and ideas are important.

The curious makes you stop and think, puzzles you, or tickles your imagination. The curious may not only be found in the rare and spectacular but hides in our everyday world. To study the material world around us, objects, sites, landscapes, environments, is to study the human condition. These are not just "things", but traces of people's intentional and unintentional behavior reflecting aspects such as memory, labor, imagination and feeling. As the texts in this first volume show, we can gain a new understanding of a work of art, a piece of pottery or an ancient boat by addressing how they are reworked, exhibited, reconstructed or researched.

What I particularly celebrate about presenting this first issue is the long work and dedication by the founders, who have now succeeded in bringing this journal into the world. The Curious Things initiative creates an opportunity for students from many scholarly backgrounds to publish their work and contribute their important work to the field.

I look forward to seeing how *Curious Things* evolves, and I hope it becomes a long-lasting forum for sharing and discussing all things curious.

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Circling Back

Keywords: *past in the present; exhibition curation; time in archaeology; Michel Serres*

Exhibition methods from a non-linear chronological perspective

Frederik Engel Møller

Abstract

To exhibit chronologies can be a difficult undertaking – especially if the chronologies span millennia. This article is an effort to present an alternative method of exhibiting chronologies in museums by introducing a non-linear model. This model is based on the Eketorps Veckband *by Swedish archaeologist Elin Engström and focuses on the non-linear structure of chronologies and time, and theories on folds in time, as proposed by scholars Michel Serres, Gavin Lucas, and Laurent Olivier. The model's purpose is to visualize encounters across time and space, which objects can be exposed to – this is exemplified in this article by classical sculptures and how the perception of these has changed over time. By viewing time in a non-linear fashion, we can change our perception of some objects as being frozen in time and instead as constantly being re-evaluated and changing. Thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between the present and the past.*

Introduction

This article is inspired by a 2024 seminar on chronology, titled *Critical Chronology: Periodization and Temporality in a Multidisciplinary Light*[1], held at the University of Copenhagen. The interesting discussions on chronology and temporality made me want to revisit my master's thesis, which examined the reuse of Classical antiquity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Møller, 2023) and reevaluate the importance of time and chronologies as tools to shape the past and present.

I was fascinated by a discussion from the above-mentioned seminar on how to display chronology in a museum. When viewing chronologies as linear timelines going from "the beginning" to the present, several problems arose. Firstly, many museum buildings face spatial

1 Danish: *Kritisk Kronologi: Periodisering og Timelighed i et Flerfagligt Lys*. Facilitated by Amalie Skovmøller. Held 12th of April 2024.

difficulties, as exhibiting chronology as a linear route would have to propel the guests ever-forward through different eras/styles/cultures/events. Secondly, the sheer information load on the guests by doing so would exhaust the guests quickly – museum fatigue (Gilman, 1916) – as broad chronologies often entail large amounts of information and objects. While listening to the discussion, I was reminded of a model – *Eketorps Veckband* (Engström, 2015, p. 236 Fig. 79) – which I was introduced to at another seminar[2]. I propose that this model – consisting of a ribbon with pins and folds – might be a perfect candidate on which to apply methods communicating the complexities of time to museum guests in exhibitions engaged in archaeology, history or other subjects concerned with exhibiting chronologies.

In our current landscape, the past reemerges as material remains. These are often studied to increase our understanding of past cultures and events. However, it would also be beneficial to study them to improve our understanding of ourselves in the present. To do so, I present the following question: What meaning do archaeological objects convey in the modern museum, and what does the encounter with them evoke in our understanding of the past? Just as a person is the sum of past moments lived; societies are shaped by past events. These events are observed from a present perspective, which is viewed as separated from the past – presentism (Olivier, 2019, p. 22). Though the specific memories linked to these events may now be lost in the mists of time, we can trace some of the fabrics of society through the material remains left behind by past cultures. These material remains exist in the present yet are associated with the past – they transcend time and space and give the observer a glimpse through the fog of time. These encounters with the past through material remains create temporal folds – linking the present and past over vast amounts of time in an instant (Deleuze, 2006; Serres & Latour, 2008, p. 59). These folds may also link ideas - though, as I argue, it is not a one-way street from the past to the present.

This article aims to present a theoretical framework to examine and exhibit an archaeological theme or subject through a non-linear chronology. I have done so from an archaeological perspective, both because it is my field and because archaeology is the study of the material culture of the past that has survived to the present and, therefore, concerns itself with chronologies and time (Renfrew & Bahn, 2012, pp. 12–13). Thus, the presented framework or model relates to exhibitions revolving around time and chronology in a Danish perspective, which are more than often presented in a linear chronology – examples are the permanent exhibitions at the Danish National Museum, Moesgaard, and The Danish National Gallery, which the above discussion at the seminar revolved around. This is not to say all exhibitions are linear, but those that relate to chronology often are. Parallels can be drawn to recent work on object itineraries and mobility (Bauer, 2019; Hahn & Weiss, 2013; Joyce & Gillespie, 2015), though this article is not as focused on objects but rather a more holistic idea of mobility and exchange.

2 Reframing Sculptural Reuse in the Greco-Roman World. Facilitated by Gabriella Cirucci and Jane Fejfer. Held on the 12th and 13th of October 2023.

Within art history and museology, we have also seen examples of 'ahistorical' exhibitions (J.Meijers, 1996). Though comparable, I do not believe they were trying to achieve the same as I am.

In the following sections, I discuss chronologies from a theoretical perspective. I hope that the discussions will contribute to a broader understanding of the past, time, and chronologies, while also bringing into focus our own influence on how that understanding is shaped. Lastly, I exemplify the use of the discussions in a proposed hypothetical exhibition.

The Beginning *and* the End

Where to begin is often a question of chronological order. Usually, one would start at the beginning, as with a fairy tale. Chronologies, as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, is '*the science of computing and adjusting time or periods of time, and of recording and arranging events in the order of time*'. They are often understood as representing time propelling forward in an ever-increasing complexity. The three-age system introduced by C.J. Thomsen is one example of this (Thomsen, 1838), which found its foothold in science and society at large – and became the cornerstone of archaeological exhibitions. It was devised for prehistoric Europe yet is not a fit-all chronology even within Europe, as different regions and cultures experienced e.g. Bronze Age at various moments in time (Childe, 1925, pp. 331–333). It is a *relative* chronology, as it can only be dated relative to absolute time (which itself has been relative since Einstein's theory of relativity (Einstein, 1920; Lucas, 2021, pp. 14–15, 20)) - which can be dated by e.g. carbon dating or dendrochronology, which are *absolute* chronologies (Lucas, 2005, pp. 3–5). Other chronologies are dated using historical texts that describe events or people, which we can compare and date to our current calendar. The end goal of both types of chronologies is to order events within a chronological frame, often with an evolutionary and sequential understanding of progress (Lucas, 2005, pp. 9–15).

What I propose in the following is that the "beginning" may not be the best starting point when trying to convey perceptions of the past – it is perhaps better to start with where we are now – the present.

The past in the present

The present is made of the past – not just a singular *past* but many different *pasts* (Olivier, 2004). These pasts are made up of different materials, which stem from different epochs, and different cultures.

The past in the past is a concept which has been explored within archaeology for some time (Alcock, 2002; R. Bradley, 2014; Lund, 2022; Olivier, 2004; Yoffee, 2007). It revolves around the study of the material remains of an older past in a younger past. A good example of this, highlighted by archaeologist Laurent Olivier (Olivier, 2004, p. 204), is Susan Alcock's book

Archaeologies of the Greek Past: Landscape, Monuments, and Memories, which highlights how the Greeks under Roman rule were nostalgic for Hellenistic Greece, while the Classical Greeks were deeply fascinated by places thought to belong to the Homeric era.

In a similar way, European and American cultures reflect on antiquity and mimic its forms - both in art and architecture, but also in institutions, such as the American Senate. The nostalgia for Classical Greece and ancient Rome flows in the European veins and returns and revisits have been made throughout antiquity up until the present – thus evoking the past in the present. A noteworthy recent example was an executive order by the then 45th president of the United States of America Donald Trump, who wished to promote "Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture" (Trump, 2020).

The reuse of forms and materials from the past creates a *relationality* – a physical and referential relationship that moves across time (Fowler, 2017; Lund, 2022, p. 247). It is common for archaeologists to create typologies – groupings of similar objects – that are used to observe relations between artefacts. Yet, these relations also transcend the physical forms, and we must ask ourselves why people mimic objects of other cultures and not just how physically similar they are (Sørensen, 2015, p. 91). While the current use of an object may be similar to past use, there will always be a difference, just like how the blow from a hammer on the anvil is always different from the next or the previous (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 1–27; Lund, 2022, p. 247). We should, therefore, be wary of attributing the same or similar meanings to reused objects and revisited sites. From a museum's perspective, this can be resolved by highlighting certain objects' many past lives rather than focusing on one use.

The relationship to the past is an important factor when forming collective identities, and human societies – however grounded in the present – are made up of elements from the past (Olivier, 2004, p. 205). Archaeological materials, or any material remains, have a finite lifetime and only last as long as the material in which they were forged lasts. Ancient empires, like the Roman or Egyptian, persist through their material remains, which in the present are exhibited and sometimes still in use — e.g., the Colosseum. Their worlds still exist as concepts, while their realities have ceased to exist (Olivier, 2019, p. 18). This makes it easy to manipulate them into representing whatever one may want, as the social conditions that made up the fabric of the past are long gone and perhaps are only preserved in the writings of its elite and, as such, do not represent the society as a whole.

The Present in the Past

> *Time has two aspects. There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises. - (Le Guin, 2019, pp. 185–186)*

The above quote comes from Ursula Le Guin's The Dispossessed, wherein the protagonist, Shevek, explains his *General Temporal Theory* to a layman during a party. The theory tries to combine two seemingly contradicting modes of perceiving time: the linear, wherein irreversible successive instants occur, which is what is normally perceived as the progress of time; and the simultaneous, where there is no time, and the order of things is mixed together (Tavormina, 1980, p. 52). The metaphorical take from Le Guin's book is the understanding of how the future is shaped by the present and how the past causes the present.

> *Like the sister planets Urras and Anarres, which are each other's history and hope, the past and future are bound to each other. To deny the present reality of either is to deny the reality of the present itself. - (Tavormina, 1980, p. 58)*

Like the sister planets, Western cultural heritage emerged from the same root(s) and has diverged and split many times. Yet, to not acknowledge and examine the different off-shoots of Western culture is to deny understanding Western culture itself. Both of the sister planets' worldviews are real, and they shape their societies – even though they are their solar opposites. Interpretations of the past are just as real – though sometimes counterfactual – since they have lasting effects on society.

It is also good to be aware of how time works in different ways. Time is not wholly linear but folds on itself, as argued by Gilles Deleuze and Michel Serres (Deleuze, 2006; Serres & Latour, 2008, p. 59). It is common to see time progress as a line, from the reindeer hunters being replaced by Neolithic farmers, who in turn were replaced by Bronze age societies, and so forth, until the present day. Yet, what we also observe is the many folds, or repetitions, in time. Styles re-emerge in art, and places are revisited through time, both deliberate actions. While trends are repeated, it is never a complete reset to the first instance, as with circular time. Historians try to make meaning of these successive epochs and chop them up into periods, distinct enough to be separated from the previous and the subsequent (Olivier, 2004, p. 208). This can, however, be viewed as an anti-historical approach — "This idea of time being under control is at the heart of the historicist approach to the past, which is, strictly speaking, an anti-historic conception of the past." (Olivier, 2004, p. 208). Periods are also often arbitrarily applied when it comes to choosing when to cut — "it is something imposed by the scholar on the past or on the course of history, rather than something inherent in history itself." (Lucas, 2021, p. 72). A person living during the fall of the Roman empire is unlikely to have acknowledged the passage into the medieval period. Though *we* can put a date on the transition, for them, life went on as it always had.

> *To make meaning of the endless successions of time, we have to put past events into a relationship with the present – in what way does it become distinct events separated from contemporary events? In some ways they cannot be separated, as all current events are shaped by past events and all past events are observed from the present perspective. As German philosopher Walter Benjamin observes*

> *'History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit]' - (Benjamin, 1986, p. 261).*

The present can evoke the past, just like fashion can evoke styles of the past, and like fashion, there is "a flair for the topical", no matter where in the past it might come from (Benjamin, 1986, p. 261). In this manner, we must be vigilant to what aspects of the past are revitalized and how it changes our understanding of the past. As Benjamin says, "it is a tiger's leap into to past", a leap which jumps hundreds if not thousands of years and that jump takes place in an arena dominated by the ruling class (Benjamin, 1986, p. 261).

> *Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time. - (Benjamin, 1986, p. 263)*

To separate the present from the past is to say that they are two different realities when, in reality, the past is ever present in the now - and this notion of the present embedded in the past has serious consequences for the interpretation of archaeological materials and the past (Olivier, 2004, p. 210). This returns us to the question of what meaning archaeological objects convey in the modern museum and what the encounter with them evokes in our understanding of the past. We are ever susceptible to the fallacy of presentism – to insert present knowledge or beliefs into the past (Olivier, 2019). To see, e.g. the white marble sculptures of the present makes us see the white marble in the past – even if we are aware of Classical sculptures' original colourful nature (Brinkmann, 2008; Skovmøller, 2020).

The Folds of Eketorp – A Visual and Analytical Tool

> *The intermediaries - Hermes, angels, I myself as intermediary between the sciences and between science and the humanities we are forced to fly according to these curves. Sometimes things that seem incomprehensible have causes or sources that are completely limpid (…) - (Serres & Latour, 2008, p. 65)*

In her doctoral thesis *Eketorps veckningar: hur arkeologi formar tid, rum och kön*[3], Swedish archaeologist Elin Engström, presents a model, a folded ribbon with pins, to show the folds of

3 English: *The Folds of Eketorp: How Archaeology Shapes Time, Space and Gender*

time in relation to the cultural heritage site of Eketorp on Öland, Sweden (Engström, 2015, pp. 234–236 Fig. 79). This folded timeline represents the instances regarding Eketorp which have been discussed in her thesis and follows French philosopher Michel Serres view of time (Serres & Latour, 2008). Each instance creates folds or waves in the timeline, which can span many years, yet are all connected in the middle, which is a cluster of meetings connecting the central archaeological, antiquarian, and museum-relevant instances at Eketorp (Engström, 2015, p. 235). This model lets us visualize and contextualize a subject or theme with large chronological spans (Engström, 2015, p. 235; Serres & Latour, 2008, p. 64). The model allows us to reuse it – by simply adding new pins in new places, we can reshape it and see new clusters meet. Examples of how it can be used are many. From the reuse of one archaeological site, the reinterpretation of archaeological objects and shifting understandings of past cultural concepts.

Model for Exhibitions

I believe that this model can also be utilized in exhibitions. This would help visualize the intertwined and non-linear chronologies, which would otherwise simply be visualized as a straight timeline. I believe it would be highly effective when focusing on a theme – perhaps something relating to the present and contemporary discussions. I will now insert a current discussion – a discussion which has been ongoing for centuries really – into the model to highlight the potential use of this model in an exhibition. I have chosen the interpretation of Classical sculpture from Greek antiquity, as it is a subject I am greatly interested in, and which has didactic potential in this case. It is a subject often brought up and used to fit into the modern perception of the origin of Western culture.

Classical antiquity has been subjected to various appropriations and interpretations throughout time. Some of these interpretations have been conflicting with the research put forward by scholars, yet have still made their way into public knowledge and cemented themselves as "truth".

> *The human form and the human mind attained to a perfection in Greece which has impressed its image on those faultless productions, whose very fragments are the despair of modern art, and has propagated impulses which cannot cease, through a thousand channels of manifest or imperceptible operation, to ennoble and delight mankind until the extinction of the race. - (Shelley, 1886)*

Classical antiquity has been revisited time and time again (Vout, 2018). The above quote by English Poet Percy Shelly is just one of many such examples of the reverence of Classical Greece, which became evermore popular in the late eighteenth century and onward. The fascination with Classical Greece in modern times had a surge with the publication of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* in 1764, which led to a rediscovery and reappreciation of Classical art (Faedo, 2014, p. 430). Since then, Classical art has been

instrumental in building prestige and national glory within Western Imperialism (M. Bradley, 2010; Díaz-Andreu García, 2007; Funder et al., 2019). Winckelmann, however, did not invent this reverence for Classical sculpture – he merely revived it. The Romans were already bringing home vast amounts of booty from captured Greece in the late third and first centuries BCE (Kousser, 2014, 2015, pp. 115–116), and their appetite for Greek art only grew from there. While the Romans created their own art in the style of the Greeks (Kousser, 2014, pp. 385–390), they did not perceive it as being of the same standard as the high Classical period as expressed by Pliny the Elder in his *Naturalis Historia*.

> *The practice of this art then ceased for some time, but revived in the hundred and fifty-sixth Olympiad, when there were some artists, who, though far inferior to those already mentioned, were still highly esteemed. - (Plin. Nat. 34.19)*

We have also seen in contemporary times how different political groups – mainly on the right of the political spectrum – have used antiquity in the promotion of Western ideals. In 2017, the far-right white supremacy group *Identity Evropa* used Classical and neo-Classical sculptures to spread their white supremacist ideology (Balleck, 2019, pp. 145–148; Davis, 2017; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2024), and others have also used antiquity in their campaigns to promote Western ideals (Pharos, 2021). The appropriation of antiquity is however not new, as stated earlier in this text. Both the leader of fascist Italy Benito Mussolini and the leader of

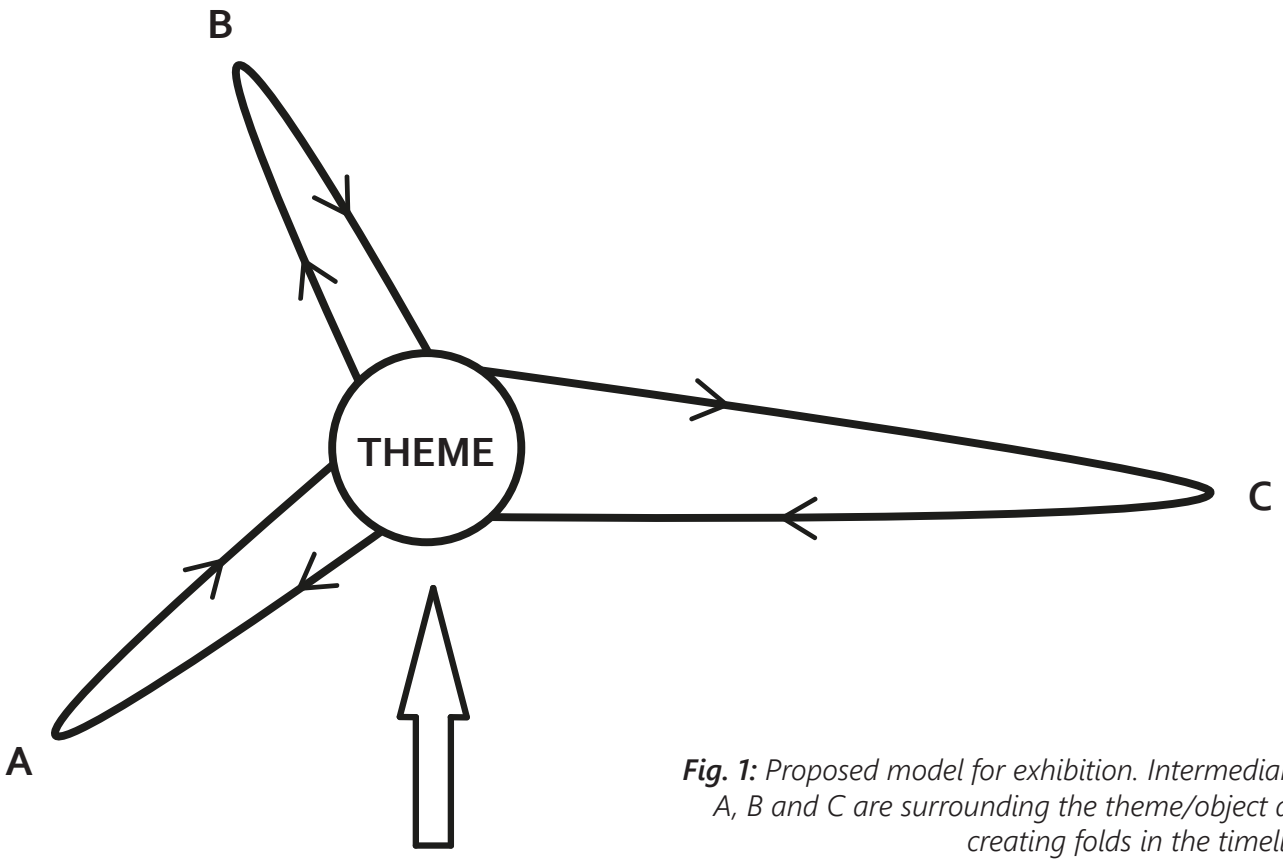


Fig. 1: *Proposed model for exhibition. Intermediaries A, B and C are surrounding the theme/object and creating folds in the timeline.*

Nazi Germany Adolf Hitler used antiquity extensively in their campaigns to promote racial and cultural supremacy (Chapoutot, 2016; Haskell & Penny, 1981, p. 199; Painter, 2018; Squire, 2014, pp. 16–23). And even before them, antiquity was used in self-promotion by nations and political actors in Europe and abroad (Faedo, 2014; Miles, 2014, pp. 511–512; Vout, 2018).

We have here seen some leaps and folds in time, wherein the past has been evoked in the present. To put this into the exhibition model, we would first have to establish the central theme – that is Classical antiquity and its sculptures. The theme is located in the present and is the entry point for the museum guests. From this central theme, the folds of time leap out. These folds are interpreted and communicated through intermediaries (Engström, 2015, p. 235; Serres & Latour, 2008, p. 65) who connect the leaps in time and highlight how some connections which seem complex may be simpler than imagined.

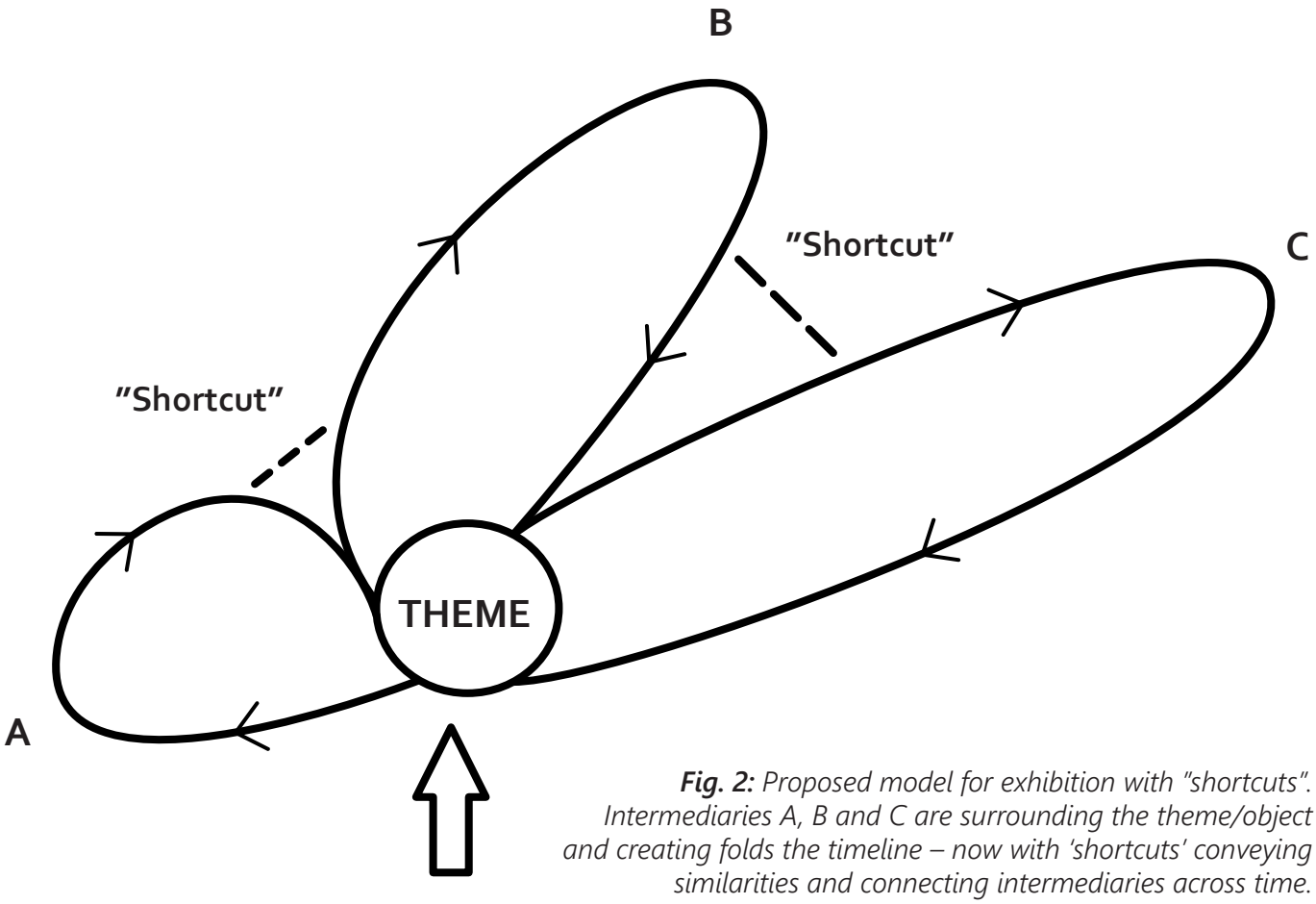


Fig. 2: *Proposed model for exhibition with "shortcuts". Intermediaries A, B and C are surrounding the theme/object and creating folds the timeline – now with 'shortcuts' conveying similarities and connecting intermediaries across time.*

Examples of these intermediaries in the current case could be Pliny the Elder (Fig. 2: A), Winckelmann (Fig. 2: B), and perhaps even Donald Trump (Fig. 2: C). Each of these people connects the past with the present and thus anchors the theme across the chronological gaps. When the guest enters the exhibition, they are confronted first with the theme – the sculptures, which are material remains from the past, and are very present in the contemporary. Following the curves of time mentioned by Serres (Serres & Latour, 2008, p. 65), the guest is presented with cases of time folding in on itself. This should manifest itself in the exhibition as a slight

departure from the central theme (which I imagine being in the centre of the room), which both communicates the leap in time and the connection through the intermediary. For Pliny, this would be his comparison between his contemporary sculptors and those of the Classical Greek era. This could be exemplified by presenting the quote and two sculptures, each representing the Roman and Greek sculptors – though finding Greek originals might prove difficult.

The exhibition could add another layer of complexity by having some of the folds overlap. Winckelmann was heavily influenced by the authors of Antiquity and therefore overlaps with them. Here the exhibition could be designed much like an IKEA store, where you follow the designated route through the building – from living room to bedroom to bathroom etc. You are however also able to utilize several shortcuts connecting two areas of the store. This will allow the exhibition to convey similarities in the folds of time without the need for repetitions. It will thus allow intermediary A, Pliny, to be connected to intermediary B, Winckelmann, and so forth. This can be repeated infinitely, though museum fatigue would likely be a limit.

The folding nature of this model will also allow the museum to utilize rooms with limited space. Temporary dividers will enable us to reshape the exhibition to fit the needed narrative. Further, the intermediaries do not necessarily have to be historical figures; they could also be contemporary artists or scholars contemplating a theme or object – such as with The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek's exhibition *Petrified Ideals* (Aug. 2023).

Conclusion

The past is all around us and conveying the complexity of time in writing and exhibition is challenging. An object's meaning changes right before you. They are not solely objects of the past, neither are they exclusively objects of the present. By employing this exhibition method, I hope that museums will be able to highlight the changing nature of objects as they move through time and space.

The folding nature of the model helps relativize a theme or object in a chronological setting. When do the relevant changes appear, and how does it influence the perception of the theme? Classical antiquity is a period in time, yet classical sculptures are both a theme and object which transgresses this periodization. This is just one of many examples, that would benefit from being highlighted in a new non-linear chronology. Our perception of the past is heavily shaped by the present and its current ideas rather than factual evidence - as with polychromy. I hope that this method and models can help change the perception of objects as frozen in time, but rather everchanging and influenced not only by the past but also the present. By circling back, we will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the past and the present, and perhaps we will also be able to glimpse at where we are heading.

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Reinterpretations of ceramics from Hedegård

- An interdisciplinary approach to Iron Age pottery based on Nina Lund's ceramics exhibition

Emma Brouer Colband & Angelyn Sørensen

Keywords: *Archaeology, Denmark, Hedegård, Iron Age, Interdisciplinary, Ceramics*



Abstract

This article explores archaeological ceramic finds from the Hedegård settlement and burial site in Central Jutland, Denmark, dating from the late Pre-Roman Iron Age to the early Roman Iron Age. The site features distinctive pottery used in both daily life and burial contexts. The article highlights the interdisciplinary collaboration between archaeologist Orla Madsen and ceramicist Nina Lund, who interprets and recreates Hedegård ceramics using modern pottery techniques. Lund's work is showcased in an exhibition alongside the original prehistoric vessels, illustrating their functional and aesthetic qualities. Madsen's archaeological insights into the vessels' historical and cultural context complement Lund's practical approach, bringing new perspectives to the understanding of Iron Age ceramics. This collaboration emphasizes how combining archaeological knowledge with hands-on ceramic reconstruction can deepen our understanding of ancient craftsmanship, daily life, and ritual practices. The article underscores the value of interdisciplinary research in exploring the functionality, social meaning, and artistic expression of ancient pottery.

Introduction

In 2024 the Museum of Central Jutland, Museum of Horsens, and Moesgaard Museum began excavating the Hedegård settlement, where we, two prehistoric archaeology students from the University of Copenhagen, participated during our seminar excavation in August this year.

During the fieldwork, we stayed in the guesthouse of ceramicist Nina Lund. She has collaborated with archaeologist Orla Madsen – who excavated the Hedegård burial site between 1986-93 – to recreate the pottery from Hedegård. The result is a contemporary exhibition where Lund reinterprets the original Iron Age pottery, not by reconstructing the ancient techniques, but by shaping new vessels on a potter's wheel using stoneware, glaze, and modern kilns. Her works give the pottery a contemporary aesthetic and functional character that speaks to modern everyday life.

This article presents an archaeological evaluation of the exhibition and its underlying assumptions. It draws on relevant archaeological literature concerning Pre-Roman Iron Age pottery from Jutland and combines this with our observations and knowledge as archaeology students. In particular, we examine how well the recreated vessels reflect the archaeological record and what interpretative choices are made when historical material culture is translated into modern design. This evaluation is based on an archaeological perspective and includes input from both a ceramic and an archaeological angle.

A central idea behind the exhibition is that form and function are closely linked in material culture. While this may seem straightforward, archaeological theory has shown that the relationship is more complex. Function can include not only practical use, but also social roles and symbolic meaning, and should be understood in relation to context. In our evaluation, we consider how the exhibition presents form and function, and how this representation connects to broader discussions in archaeology.

Hedegård

The burial site and the settlement at Hedegård are located on an elevated and demarcated area by the upper course of the Skjern River in Central Jutland (fig. 1 and fig. 2). At the edge of the slope lay a distinctly fenced settlement area, and 30-40 meters north of the settlement was a large burial site (Olesen, 2019: 247). They are contemporaneous, and they are dated to the late Pre-Roman Iron Age and the beginning of the early Roman Iron Age.

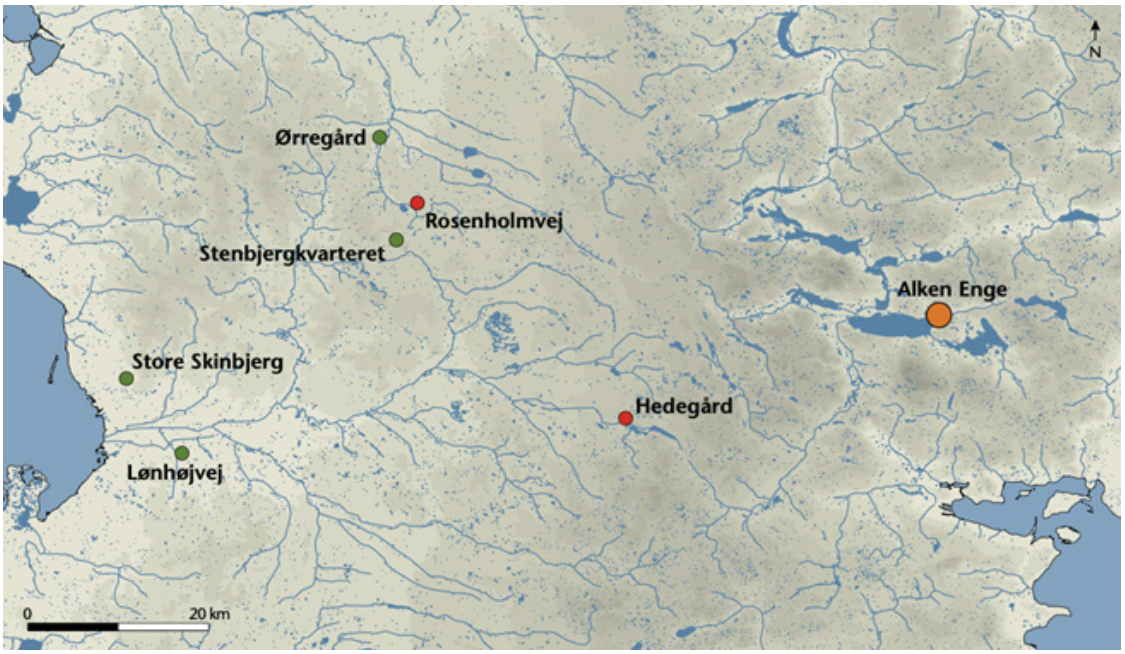


Fig. 1: *Central Jutland showing Hedegård and Rosenholmvej (red circle), and Alken Enge (orange circle). Also marked on the map are other simultaneous burial sites, Lønhøjvej and Store Skindbjerg, and settlements, Ørregård and Stenbjergkvarteret (green circle).*

The burial site was excavated in 1986-93 and is one of the most extensive sites in the region. It has provided important insights into both burial rituals and settlement patterns in prehistoric times. The most prestigious graves date to the late Pre-Roman Iron Age and early Roman Iron Age, with around 200 graves in total, including cremations, inhumations, and secondary graves (Madsen, 1997: 62). The cremation graves are dated to period II.21 in the Pre-Roman Iron Age and B1 in the Roman Iron Age, whereas the inhumation burials are from B2 in the Roman Iron

Age. With the shift of the burial types, the Hedegård burial site begins to resemble the vessel grave sites in Eastern Jutland (Olesen, 2019: 261-262, quoting Ejstrud and Jensen, 2000: 104). In addition to these graves, pits containing one to nine whole clay vessels were found, indicating their role in burial rituals (Madsen, forthcoming: 3).

Ceramics in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age

Pre-Roman pottery is very similar to Bronze Age pottery with simple utility techniques. The pottery was heavily burnished and fired, giving it a shiny black surface; we saw this type of pottery at the Hedegård settlement. The earthenware was made by hand, where the clay was rolled into long coils and stacked into a shape, which was then smoothed out. During the Roman Iron Age, the potter's wheel was introduced and became more widespread in Denmark, leading to a faster pottery production and more symmetrical and uniform shapes. The pottery was fired in simple open kilns. In Denmark, one has yet to find a completely preserved pottery kiln. Either wood or peat was used for firing, which lasted about half a day to a full day, and the temperature was between 800-900 degrees (Jensen, 2003: 147-148).

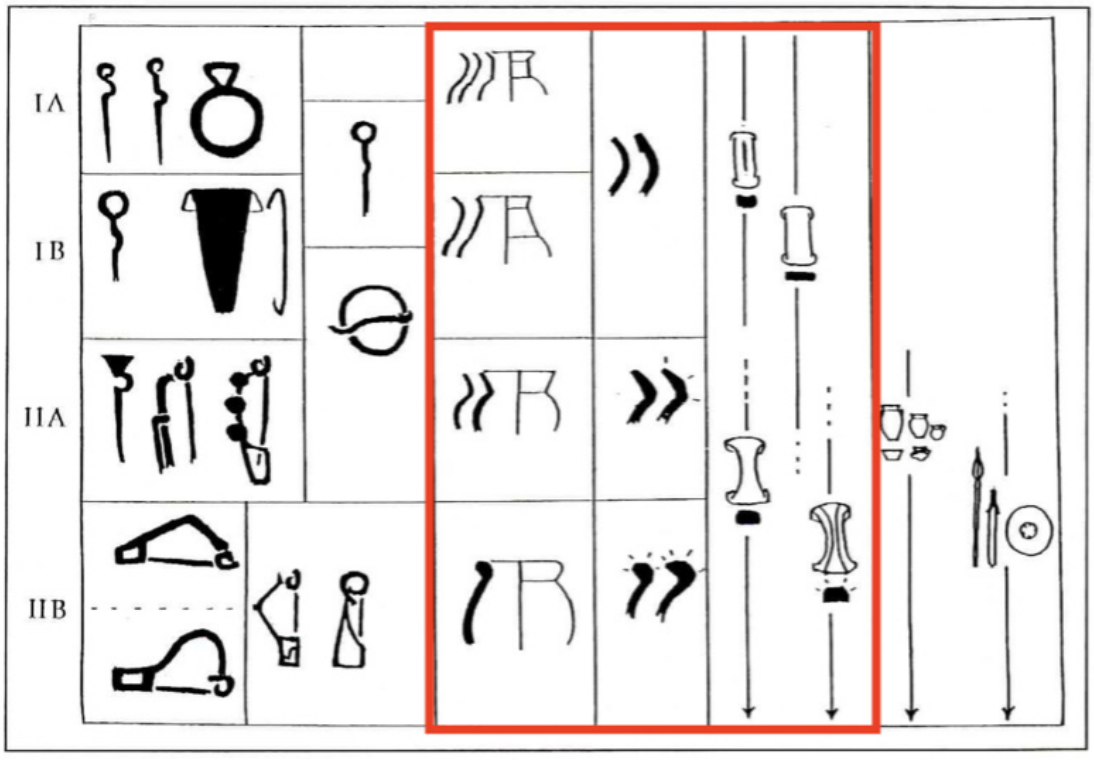


Fig. 2: *Suggested chronology scheme of the Pre-Roman Iron Age of Jutland. On the left in the red square are shown the rim types, and on the right in the red square are shown the different handle types.*

Somewhere between BCE and CE a shift in the production of pottery happens. This development in pottery shifted from focusing on function over aesthetics to focusing on both. Pottery was one of the most common items in households, but it also had ritual and commercial functions, where different styles and qualities of pottery were used to signify social differences. Ceramics are often dated based on stylistic features, shape, and ornamentation.

Looking at fig. 2 on the left side in the red square, one can see the development of rim types on pottery in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age. The rim played an important role both functionally and aesthetically, as it not only needed to reinforce the vessel's structure but also contribute to its usability, such as for pouring or storage. At Hedegård settlement, we found many examples of thickened rims. This type of rim could be straight or slightly flared and served to strengthen the vessel and make it more durable. The thickening provided a better grip when the vessels were moved or poured from. The flared rim was functional, as it made it easier to pour liquids from the vessel. This type of rim was often used for drinking vessels. Inward-curving rims are often seen on vessels used for food storage.

In the Pre-Roman Iron Age, there were two different handle types: strap-shaped and X-shaped, see fig. 2 on the right side in the red square. The handles in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age depended on the vessel's function and local style. X-shaped handles are the most common type found at Hedegård settlement, and the handles are dated to 200 BCE to 200 CE. X-shaped handles are a special type often used on larger vessels or jars. The function of this type of handle provides a robust construction, making it easier to lift heavy vessels. The design of the handle may have been aesthetically motivated and may also have had symbolic significance. X-shaped handles are often found on somewhat coarser, hand-formed clay vessels. Multiple variations of X-shaped handles appeared, and the handles are a good example of how form and function played a role in the development of pottery in the early Iron Age.

The pottery finds from the Hedegård burial site offer insight into daily life and cultural practices during the Iron Age. Most consist of shards from household items like jars, bowls, and pots used for cooking and storage. Pottery fragments found in graves suggest their use in burial rituals, possibly as containers for offerings or food for the deceased. Some shards appear intentionally broken, which might symbolize the end of life or a transition to another existence, possibly "releasing" the object for the spirit world. The pottery found in graves is often less decorative and shows signs of use, indicating that these items were part of daily life, highlighting a close connection between the living and the dead, where buried items reflected both life and the passage to the afterlife.

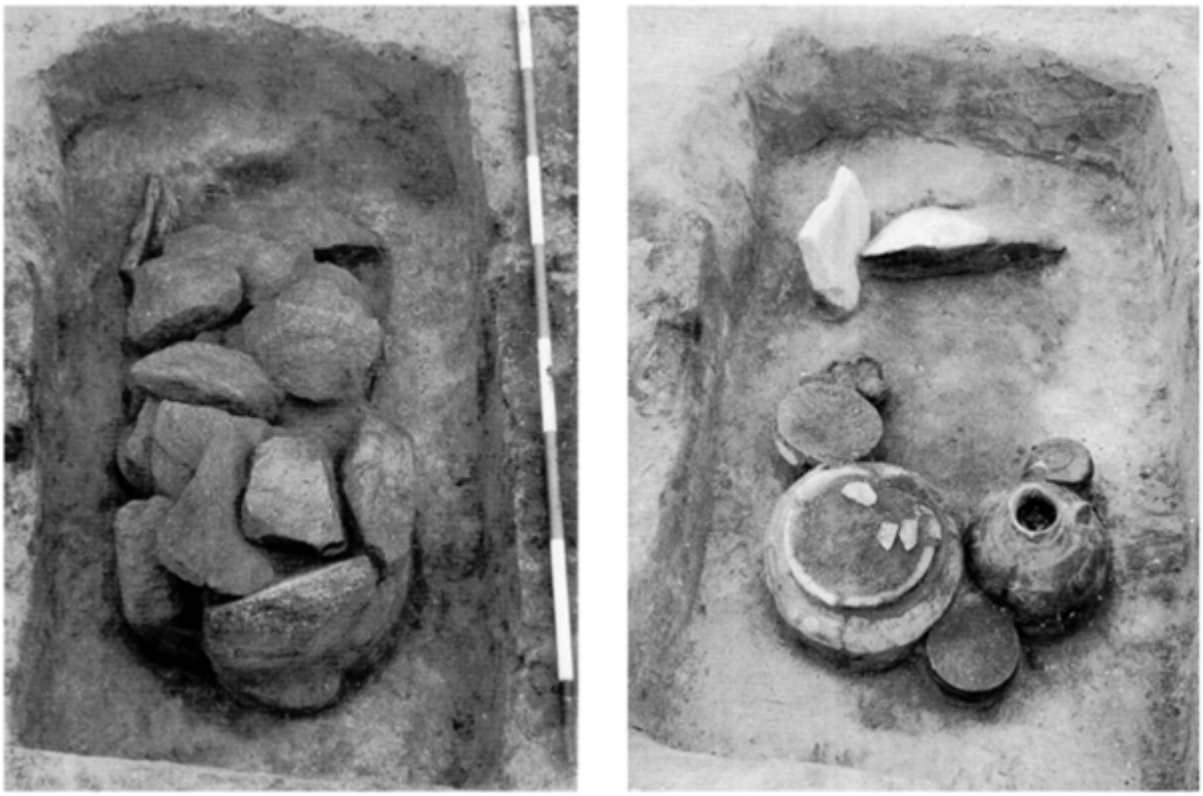


Fig. 3: *Ceramics found in one of the secondary graves at Hedegård burial site. To the left the frequently occurring stone packing above and around the vessels. To the right the vessel is exposed in the pit. Feature seen from the south.*

Experimental archaeology as a method

Experimental archaeology is a method used to recreate prehistoric constructions, material culture and processes to get a better understanding of a society's technologies. This is done by incorporating analogues in the form of ethnographic studies of contemporary societies and technologies. Furthermore, it is important to understand the degrading processes in the material culture which can affect the quality of the archeological material. Experimental archaeology should be understood as a proposal of how a construction in theory could have looked like and functioned as, rather than a concrete answer (Meldgaard & Rasmussen 1996, 9-12). These experiments can be executed by craftsmen in specific fields in cooperation with an archeologist. When analyzing a society's ceramics, one might get a better understanding of its craftsman traditions, production conditions and social structure. Furthermore, if an excavation contains finds of the original clay material used for the vessels, wood stove, misfired ceramics and tools used for pottery, this will broaden our knowledge of the prehistoric local potter's technology and therefore make experimental archeological reconstructions more accurate (Claudi-Hansen 2014, 3-7).

Nina Lund "Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer"

Nina Lund is a ceramic artist from Hedegård, Denmark, who specializes in traditional craftsmanship and modern ceramics. She lived in France for several years, where she trained in the field of ceramics. In the late 1990s, she established her own ceramics workshop in Hedegård, where she continues to work today. In 2024 Lund created an art exhibition called *Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*[1] which stretched from the 8th of june until 31 of august. The exhibition is an interpretation of the 2000-year-old Iron Age ceramics found at the Hedegård excavation 30 years prior, located only one kilometer from Lund's ceramics workshop. The archeologist, Orla Madsen, interpreted the composition of vessels as a prehistoric "table setting" of the individual who was buried with the ceramics. Lund used her knowledge as a ceramist together with the method of experimental archeology to recreate the ceramics with a modern interpretation. The focus was especially on the vessel's attachment of handles, finish of the edges and the functionality. She used different sculpting techniques and firing methods than the prehistoric local potters used at Hedegård. Instead of using the Iron Age pottery techniques such as rolling it into long coils as well as using earthenware, Lund threw the clay and used stoneware. Therefore, the focus is solely on the clay vessels functionality and how it could be applied for both today's society and the Iron Age society at Hedegård. In the exhibition the original Iron Age vessel borrowed from Museum Midtjylland and Museum Horsens, is shown next to the contemporary version made by Lund. On the sides of each vessel, a sign is placed with both the archaeologist and ceramicist's interpretation as seen on figure 5 (www.keramik.dk).



Fig. 4: *Nina Lund Keramik*

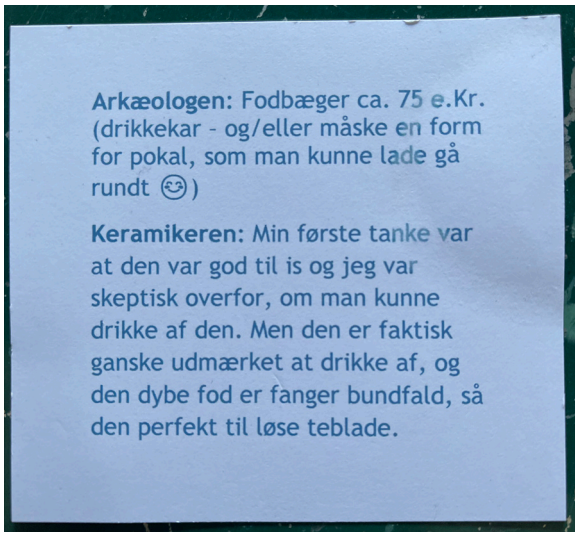


Fig. 5: *Example of an interpretation*

1 English: *Ceramic Idiom - 2000 years and one kilometer*

Ceramicists and archaeologist vessel interpretations

Interdisciplinary collaboration can yield several important results. By integrating diverse perspectives from various fields, teams can achieve more thorough problem-solving and foster innovation. Each discipline contributes its own methodologies and theories, enhancing both understanding and creativity. Merging knowledge from different areas can stimulate creative thinking, generating new ideas and solutions that might not arise within a single discipline. The combination of concepts and techniques from multiple fields can lead to pioneering innovations that expand the limits of possibility. Furthermore, by tackling issues from various viewpoints, interdisciplinary collaborations can create outcomes with a more substantial societal impact, as they take into account a broader array of variables and stakeholder viewpoints.

At the exhibition at Nina Lund Keramik each vessel has an interpretation of its functionality from an archeologist's perspective as well as the ceramicist's perspective. The archeologist Orla Madsen's perspective is focused on dating the vessel and its primary function seen from its typology. The ceramicist Nina Lund's perspective is focused on function determined by the vessel's form. Furthermore, Lund's perspective is a contemporary view of what the vessel could have been used for in a dining context in the year 2024. Here she includes some new interpretations for the vessel's function which is common knowledge for a ceramicist. Following vessels will not be introduced in chronological order, and it's therefore important to note the shift in burial custom from B1 and B2 that happened in 70 BCE.

Handled vessel (fig. 6) is described as an open vessel, but it's still fairly closed with the opening being 80-90% opened. It's about 8-12 cm tall and only has one handle (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23.) The archeologist interprets this type of vessel as a bowl used to eat from or as a vessel used for storage. The ceramicist describes the handled vessel's function as a vessel for serving liquid food.



Fig. 6: *Handled vessel*

Archaeologist: *Handled vessel. Ca. 75 BCE (Possibly used to eat from, but could also have been used for storage).*

Ceramicist: *Very beautiful well balanced bowl. The handle is exactly at the right place and its possible to serve more liquidy content without spilling. For soups, sauce or strawberries.*

Attachment 1: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

In one of the East-Jutlandic earthenware graves, this type of vessel has been found with soot residue on the inside of its wall as burned food on the outside. Claudi-Hansen says it therefore had been used as both a serving vessel as well as a vessel for preparation of food (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 195). Looking at the vessel's form it can be decided if the accessibility of the vessel's body is restricted or unrestricted looking at the diameter of the vessel's opening. The criterion for an accessible vessel is that "the diameter of the opening is smaller than both the maximum diameter and the height of the vessel's body". Since the handled vessel's opening diameter is smaller than the maximum diameter but greater than the height of the vessel's body, this is considered an unrestricted vessel. This type of vessel is less suited for storage, and more suited for stirring, mixing and grinding (van der Veen 2018). Therefore, both the archaeologists' and ceramicists' interpretations are right, with the exception of the archaeologists' interpretation of the vessel being used for storage.



Fig. 7: *Footed bowl*

Archaeologist: *Footed bowl ca. 50 BCE (maybe used for storage but can also hold ½ liter beer).*

Ceramicist: *One almost gets to think about Bjørn Winblad and maybe a small plant. The shape makes you want to hold it with both hands. It's also beautiful for fruit.*

Attachment 2: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

Footed bowl (fig. 7). The archeologist interprets this type of vessel as a form of storage which can hold around ½ liter liquid, possibly beer. The ceramicists interpret the footed bowl as a possible fruit bowl.

Since the diameter of the vessel's opening seems equivalent to the maximum diameter this is an unrestricted vessel form. This indicates the vessel was not suitable for storage, but rather for serving or stirring (van der Veen 2018). Whether it was beer, as the archaeologist interprets, or fruit, as the ceramicist suggests, it cannot be determined by only using this method of analysis.

Archaeologist: *Vase ca. 75 BCE (for storage of liquids - water, juice and beer).*

Ceramicist: *A form that can be used both as a jug and a vase. Very beautiful handle with a good balance.*

Attachment 3: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen



Fig. 8: *Storage vessel*

Storage vessels (fig. 8) are a vessel with a narrow opening together with one or two handles. This type of vessel can be found in different sizes (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23). The archaeologist describes this type of vessel as storage for liquids. The ceramists agree but add that it can pour liquid as well.

The maximum diameter and the height of this vessel are both greater than the vessel's opening. Therefore, this vessel can be used for storage (van der Veen 2018). Microscopical analyses were used of the crust located at the bottom of two bronze kettles. These kettles show signs of having contained barley, cranberries, myrica gale and yeast. The ceramic storage vessels could have had the same function as the imported bronze kettles, since they show multiple similarities (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 196-197). These vessels can also be seen in relation to footed beakers and cups.



Fig. 9: *Footed beaker*

Archaeologist: *Footed beaker ca. 75 BCE (drinking vessel - and/or maybe a type of trophy, that could be passed around).*

Ceramicist: *My first thought was that it was suited for ice and I was skeptical whether it could be used for drinking. But it's quite excellent to drink from and the tall feet catches precipitate, making it perfect for loose tea leaves.*

Attachment 4: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

Footed beaker (fig. 9) is referred to as an open vessel that is 10-12 cm tall with a distinctive foot (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23). The archeologist interprets this as a drinking vessel or a form of trophy to pass around. The ceramicist interprets this as a drinking vessel where the precipitate gathers in the foot, making it suitable for tea leaves to fall into. Lund says the function of these vessels could be a cup with a built-in strainer (Hald 2024).

Both the footed beakers height and maximum diameter is not greater than the opening diameter, making it a vessel used for serving rather than storage (van der Veen 2018). The footed beaker can often be found close to the storage vessels, including the bronze vessels. This indicates that the liquid in the storage vessel could have been served in the footed beaker. This means that the drink served in this vessel could possibly have been a fermented drink. Oftentimes a cup can be found inside the footed beaker in a grave context (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 196-198).

The cup (fig. 10) is an open vessel with a height of 5-7 cm, often with a handle. Often found inside of the footed beaker or close to it (Ejstrud & Jensen 2000, 23). The archeologist interprets this vessel as a cup you can drink out of. The ceramicist has recreated this vessel as bigger than the original Iron Age cup as well as changed the rim edge so it's more convenient to drink from.

The cup's opening is smaller than the maximum diameter while the height is smaller than the diameter of the opening, making it unrestricted (van der Veen 2018). This vessel can be seen in relation to the footed beaker, as well as the storage vessels. Findings from two drinking horns indicate that the footed beaker contains a fermented drink while the cup could contain a honey drink. Another interpretation of this cup is that it could have been used as a ladle to transfer liquid from the storage vessel into the footed beaker (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 198).



Fig. 10: *Cup*

Archaeologist: *Cup ca. 50 BCE (to drink from).*

Ceramicist: *A small whimsical and almost cute cup. I've sized it up a half time and made the edges more fit for drinking, so it could be usable for today.*

Attachment 4: Translated by Angelyn Sørensen

This interpretation would correspond with the ceramicist's choice of changing the original size and rim edge due to the vessel's poor functionality as a drinking cup.

It can be argued if the *Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer* exhibition is perceived as experimental archeology in the sense that Lund doesn't use earthenware and rolling the clay into long coils as the danish Iron age society did. The focus in this project lies solely on the vessel's form and function with the cooperation between Lund as the ceramist craftsman and Madsen as the archeologist. Furthermore, Lund incorporates her knowledge of modern table setting pottery as analogues that can draw parallels for the prehistoric society at Hedegård.

Further analyses

Ceramic kilns

As mentioned earlier, findings related to the production of ceramics such as tools and kilns can tell us more about the social structure at Hedegård and if the ceramics were local. During the excavation at Hedegård in 2024, at the center of the settlement a feature which looked like a well on the geophysics map, turned out to be a ceramic kiln when it was unearthed. It was a symmetrical circle containing a dark layer of soil as well as a thin line of red clay, creating a more oval line inside the dark soil layer circle. In the dark soil layer, there were pieces of ceramic shards that might have been misfired. Unfortunately, the kiln wasn't fully excavated. If Hedegård gets re-excavated in the future, it would be interesting to finish the excavation of this particular ceramic kiln as well as possible more kilns. Based on the fact that the settlement's cultural layer had a high concentration of ceramic sheds, a large production of clay vessels could have been taking place at Hedegård.

Clay material

A possible large clay production can further be confirmed by a previous excavation in the 1980's-1990's. There the archeologists found a large pit that was dug at the depth of 2 meters north-west of the village. The pit contained clay soil, which indicates that the people at the Hedegård settlement used local clay and therefore had the material to produce the large amount of clay vessels as seen on the location (Madsen 1997, 61-62). When excavating at Hedegård in 2024 the north-western side of the village was reopened, and large amounts of clay was unearthed. Lund got to bring some of the clay back to her ceramic workshop, where new interpretations and discoveries of the Hedegård pottery could take place in the future.

Macrofossils-, pollen- and lipid analyses

To broaden the understanding of the Hedegård vessels' functionality, it would be interesting to look further into what food or beverages the different vessels possibly contained. Some

vessels from the Roman Iron Age have been shown to contain small rocks that are interpreted as symbolic meals. For vessels lacking these rocks, it could be beneficial to use scientific analyses. Those types of analyses could include macrofossils- and pollen analyses of the soil inside the vessel. Furthermore, lipid analysis could be used as well by taking food residue from the inside of the vessel wall. These analyses have previously been taken at settlements contemporary with Hedegård. From those analyses, traces of barley, cranberries, myrica gale and yeast can be indicated from the vessel wall (Claudi-Hansen 2013, 195). Therefore, similar analyses could be used to get an understanding of the vessels' content together with Lund and Madsens interpretation of the Hedegård pottery to get a more accurate idea of each vessel type's function.

Conclusion

The collaboration between ceramicist Nina Lund and archaeologist Orla Madsen stands out for its innovative approach to understanding Iron Age ceramics. Lund's use of modern techniques, such as the potter's wheel and stoneware, alongside traditional forms, enables a reimagining of the ancient ceramics, emphasizing both their functional and aesthetic aspects. By exhibiting her reinterpretations alongside original artifacts, she effectively bridges the gap between the past and the present, illuminating the evolving relationship between functionality and artistry in pottery. Lund's use of stoneware instead of earthenware and her innovative sculpting methods reflect a contemporary perspective that emphasizes the practical application of these vessels in today's society while honoring their historical significance. By doing this, she narrows down the vessel's functionality by using her background knowledge as a ceramicist. By examining the footed beaker, Lund interprets this vessel as having a built-in strainer which is a new idea of its functionality. By sizing up the original Iron Age cup, she unintentionally confirms the vessel is not suited as a drinking cup, corresponding with Claudi-Hansen's interpretation of the same type of vessel. This confirms that analogues of modern society table settings can help us broaden our knowledge of the Iron Age society at Hedegårds craftsman traditions, production conditions and social structure.

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Fig. 3: Ceramics found in one of the secondary graves at Hedegård burial site. To the left the frequently occurring stone packing above and around the vessels. To the right the vessel is exposed in the pit. Feature seen from the south. *Madsen, 1996-97: 62.*

Fig. 4: Nina Lund Keramik. *Angelyn Sørensen at Nina Lund keramik.*

Fig. 5: Example of an interpretation. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 6: Handled vessel. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 7: Footed bowl. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 8: Storage vessel. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 9: Footed beaker. *Nina Lund.*

Fig. 10: Cup. *Angelyn Sørensen at Nina Lund keramik.*

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Attachments

Attachment 1: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about handled vessels. "*Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Hankekar. Ca. 75 e.Kr. (Muligvis til at spise af, men kan også bruges til opbevaring)

Keramikeren: Meget smukt og velafbalanceret skål. Hanken sidder det helt rigtig sted, og man ville kunne servere mere flydende indhold uden at spilde. Til suppe, sovs eller jordbær."

Attachment 2: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about footed bowls. "*Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer*" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Fodskål. ca 50 e.Kr. (måske til opbevaring, men kan vel også rummer ½ l. øl)

Keramikeren: Man kommer næsten til at tænke på Bjørn Winblad og måske en lille plante. Formen giver lyst til at holde om den med begge hænder. Den er også smuk til frugt."

Attachment 3: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about storage vessels. "Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Vase. Ca. 75 e.Kr. (til opbevaring af væsker – vand, saft, øl)

Keramikeren: En form, der kan bruges både som kande og vase. Meget fin hank med god balance."

Attachment 4: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about footed beakers. "Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Fodbæger ca. 75 e.Kr. (drikkekar – og/eller måske en form for pokal, som man kunne lade gå rundt)

Keramikeren: Min første tanke var at den var god til is og jeg var skeptisk overfor, om man kunne drikke af den. Men den er faktisk ganske udmærket at drikke af, og den dybe fod er fanger bundfald, så den perfekt til løse teblade."

Attachment 5: Lund, N. (2024).

Sign with text about cups. "Keramisk Formsprog - 2000 år og én kilometer" exhibition. Nina Lund Keramik, Ejstrupholm.

"Arkæologen: Kop ca. 50 e.Kr. (til at drikke af)

Keramikeren: Lille finurlig og næsten nuttet kop. Jeg har forstørret den en halv gang og gjort den mere drikkevenlig i kanten, for at vi ville kunne bruge den i dag."

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Essay: The Material of a Ghost

On the Function of Charged Matter as Artistic Material

Adam Oreskov Vangslev Kierkegaard

Keywords: *materiality, cultural materiality, ready-made, art history*

Abstract

This essay examines the ontology of a particular category of material used in contemporary artistic practice. It argues for an expanded understanding of artistic materials that accounts for the functional role of pre-existing cultural objects when they are employed as material. To this end, this essay introduces the concept of charged matter to describe compositional materials that carry cultural significance inseparable from their material use. The term is situated between the concepts of material and materiality, describing the convergence of these two notions – when cultural signs become artistic matter. Through a series of case studies centred around Arthur Jafa's Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death *(2016), this essay aims to demonstrate how charged matter continues to haunt the artworks it composes, shaping not only their form but also their meaning. In these instances, the cultural function of such materials supersedes their status as malleable base matter. In this essay, I therefore argue that to understand how this type of material functions in contemporary art, the cultural associations of these materials must be thought of as intrinsic to their role as compositional matter.*

Introduction

A projector's light is formed into living images (Fig. 1-3). They shift and flicker between violence and joy, triumph and tragedy. We see a basketball arena; the stands filled with vibrant bodies moving in celebration. Then an image of the Civil Rights protests: black-and-white images of a child waving, surrounded by dancing women raising their picket signs in resistance. People dancing, a man pop-locking in a room surrounded by his cheering peers. The police shooting a bullet in the back of a Black man. An intoxicated lap dance, a woman bouncing against a man's crotch on the street. *The Birth of a Nation*. Barack Obama singing *Amazing Grace* at the eulogy of Clementa C. Pinckney, who was murdered in the terrorist attack in Charleston, 2015. *The Birth of a Nation*. A praying woman falling to the floor. A man in blue clothes falling to the ground at the hands of a man in red clothes. Floyd Mayweather lifting his arms, flexing his muscles before a fight. Armoured police rushing out of a van. The civil rights movement. A child striking his mom. Police brutality. Muhammad Ali. Ballroom culture, a Black body falling to the ground, voguing. *The Birth of a Nation*. Martin Luther King. A burning sun. Drake. A child with his arms raised high above his head, walking towards the police arresting his mother, crying out, 'What's going on?'. Aretha Franklin. A police officer slams a woman's head into the concrete. Slam dunk by LeBron James, flickering lights.

These images compose the artwork *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* (2016) by American artist Arthur Jafa (b. 1960). They occur and recur, with a pulsating and urgent



Fig. 1: *Arthur Jafa,* Love is the Message, The Message is Death *(2022). Installation view, The Douglas Hyde Gallery of Contemporary Art, Dublin.*

impression. It's a cycle that you can't quite work out. Past, present, and future, shuffled together, forming a fragmented impression of the multifaceted visual impressions of Black culture in America. It's dizzying, in its shifts between violence and greatness. The images are often too fast to recognise, yet too impactful to forget. They're bodily felt, leaving a lasting impression on the spectator. The images are predominantly repurposed, pre-existing cultural fragments collected by Jafa; together, they show the mediatised representation of Black bodies in the United States, critically examining how such representations are reproduced and circulated in the collective archive of our visual culture.



Fig. 2: *Arthur Jafa,* Love is the Message, The Message is Death *(2022). Installation view, The Douglas Hyde Gallery of Contemporary Art, Dublin.*

There's much to consider with an artwork such as this. Its materials might not seem like the most relevant. However, after viewing it, this consideration never left me because what is the material of a work like this? It seems ghost-like; it carries with it a presence outside of its formal qualities. In this sense, *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, represents a challenge to the ontology of materials within art history as it has traditionally been anchored in the tangible: pigment, marble, oil, and canvas (Ingold, 2007). As such, Jafa's work is an example of a broader turn within contemporary art, where artworks are no longer composed of these traditional materials but instead created by weaving together the intangible threads of culture. Where art is composed of materials chosen not in relation to its formal expression, but for their pre-existence. In this situation, the material becomes an active agent in the formation of the artwork's meaning, as opposed to traditional materials that were largely neutral building blocks before their transformation into art.



Fig. 3: *Arthur Jafa,* Love is the Message, The Message is Death *(2022). Installation view, The Douglas Hyde Gallery of Contemporary Art, Dublin.*

The purpose of this essay is therefore to examine this shift in material function and develop a vocabulary to describe works of art that employ a material that supersedes its base material function. This development is necessary because the application of cultural phenomena as compositional matter renders the existing categories of materials and materiality insufficient, as notions of material and materiality converge upon themselves. Materials, here understood as the *stuff* that another thing is composed of – the base material or brute form of an artwork – and materiality as the subject-object relations between this brute material and its spectator. This, however, cannot fully explain the function of matter in Jafa's work (Ingold, 2007; Tilley, 2007). Situated in the convergence of these two terms, where the cultural relation of an image becomes the base material of another is the concept of charged matter. This essay introduces the idea of *charged matter* as a concept signifying material function, in which the cultural significance of a compositional material precedes its formal qualities in its employment within a work of art. Charged matter exists in the convergence of materials and materiality as the materiality of one object/event/image is employed as the brute material of another. In this process, the materiality of the object – its subject-object relations – imbues the object's function as material and, in turn, the artwork.

Material, Materiality and Charged Matter

This leaves us with three distinct positions for analysing the material of an artwork: material, materiality and charged matter. Applying each of these to *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, illustrates the necessity of charged matter as a concept, as both material and materiality come up short in describing the material functions at play in Jafa's artwork.

So, first, we must identify what aspect of the work can be viewed as its base material. These must be the video clips. However, how can we describe what they are? Is their material the light from the projector? No, these protons of light are always different, existing in a somatic flux. Jafa's project isn't composing light – such as seen in the light and space artists: i.a. Robert Irwin, James Turrell and Mary Corse. Instead, the base material of *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* is the cultural event of the videos themselves – meaning, not the events or individuals in the videos, but the videos themselves. Jafa thus composes the artwork from prior medialised entities, as cultural signs that contribute with their cultural pre-existence to the artwork. As such, the materials are inseparable from their former materiality – the subject-object relation of their original and continual cultural impact. Jafa's work is not defined by physical qualities, but rather by its entanglements with cultural knowledge, history, and experiences: its matter is incorporeal but still strongly present. It's a material rooted outside of the somatic plane, residing within cultural memory and recollection. Like ghosts, these videos exist as spectral entities still tethered to the earthly plane. They're bearers of histories which spark recognition. Despite lacking a corporal body, they persist as phantoms, and as such, they are enacting their material function.

The concept of charged matter could be understood as a form of materiality; however, there's a clear distinction between the two. When first aired, the videos functioned within the framework they were made for, either online or in the news. However, now, as a material in an artwork, they appear once removed – repurposed as charged matter that not only depicts but also reflects on their own mediation and the societal actions inherent in these portrayals. Materiality becomes charged matter when it is recycled into the function of material, when the subject-object relation of an object is a central aspect in said object's use as a compositional material.

The material composing *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* is different from traditional materials of artistic creation, as they've existed as cultural entities before their use in the artwork. Throughout history, artworks have relied on the cultural understanding of the signs they represent. Yet, these signs have traditionally been mediated through *form*, not material. The following section explores this shift and places charged matter in a historical context of material understanding.

The Historic Role of Material

Examinations of material as signifiers of more than their physical qualities have previously been undertaken. However, significant differences separate these from the concept of charged matter

as presented in this essay. An example is found in the art of 14th-century Italy. In the works of this period – exclusively identified as theologically Christian – the material in depictions of divinity was not merely understood as representing the divine; it was seen as the actual body of the divine. These medieval objects of devotion:

> *should be understood as the immediate presence of the holy more than as indexes, icons, or symbols pointing to something else. They are [...] vibrantly active stuff, a locus of divine agency* (Bynum, 2013, p. 12).

Therefore, in this context, the material of the artwork is acutely important. Nonetheless, this material function remains tied to the form in which it is composed. The materials used in depictions of divinity become divine in relation to their *form* as a religious image. Consequently, before the material is shaped into this form, it doesn't exist as divine but as a base material without cultural charge.

Similarly, the period's reverence of ultramarine pigment as a material is an example of matter being culturally tied to the divine, as it was praised as a colour both 'illustrious, beautiful, and the most perfect, beyond all other colours [and] more expensive than gold' (Bomford et al., 1989, p. 35). This value was established within a cultural frame, and as a result of the reverence of the material itself, it was used to signify something important within a painting; if a figure wore an ultramarine robe, they would be understood as important or divine – thus, the material added context to the form to which it was applied (Bomford et al., 1989, p. 36). Nevertheless, this cultural entanglement did not extend to the material itself. Again, the significance of the material was activated in its relation to form. As such, the material, ultramarine pigment, maintained the possibility of existing outside of the cultural entanglements of the image. A similar separation seems impossible when considering the material of works like *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, as these cannot be employed without their pre-existent cultural meaning. For example, if the images from *The Birth of a Nation* were used in something as plain as a collage picturing a flower, this work would still be understood in relation to the cultural significance of the movie. The flower would be imbued with meaning, and the artwork would be seen in relation to the history of racism.

The implications of charged matter resist erasure; they remain present, as spectral echoes of meaning, haunting the artwork with their presence. This resistance is evident in a work where such erasure is attempted. In German painter Gerhard Richter's (b. 1932) *Birkenau*-series, colourful and abstract forms are painted over black and white images from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. While these images are visually erased, their cultural and historical presence persists in the work, becoming a part of its material existence. Whether one views this artistic obscuring of the horrifying images as an important or distasteful artistic gesture is not relevant to this argument – only that the charged matter in Richter's work indeed does impact the understanding of the finished work. The material presence of charged matter haunts

the work with its prior cultural and historical relations. Even when obscured, they shape the experience of the work. How this effect is utilised and fulfilled will, like all other materials, vary from artist to artist, from spectator to spectator.

An early example of charged matter within the art historical canon is found in the ready-mades of French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Duchamp exhibited pre-existing objects with minimal interventions, such as *Fountain* (1917), a porcelain urinal laid flat and signed 'R. Mutt' in black paint. At the time, the work was dismissed as non-art and excluded from an otherwise uncensored exhibition by the Society of Independent Artists in New York, 1917 (Tomkins, 1973). The form of the work caused a rupture in material understanding within artistic production. The scandal of the form was achieved through its charged matter. As previously illustrated, while the material of a traditional artwork has a symbolic function, it doesn't possess any cultural significance outside of its use in the work. The material composed into traditional painting or sculpture is a property to which form is applied; it's through this application of form, upon the passive matter, that the cultural significance appears (Lehmann, 2012, p. 10). This situation changes when an artwork is composed using charged matter. The material is apparent as itself, stripping away a layer of representation. The material appears as itself and is therefore less malleable than other materials; charged matter not only contributes formal qualities to an artwork but also social and cultural comprehension.

Charged matter cannot act neutral or passive; it can only be an active force in the formation of the artwork. While this situation is most apparent in violent or upsetting images – as is the case with *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* – this theory can be applied to all forms of creation using charged matter. This is the case with *Fountain*, as the work exists primarily as its pre-existent connotations. When Duchamp displays a urinal as an artwork, its original function and thereby cultural connotation remain visible in its new form as art. The urinal as a sign is tied to culturally taboo notions of bodily function. By using this "gross" object, Duchamp employs its cultural pre-existence, enabling its presence to function as a critique. The cultural charge of the urinal juxtaposed the established notions of fine art, causing two worlds to collide through the display of pure material. It was not the material of the urinal, its porcelain surface, that conjured this tension and censorship; rather, it was the urinal's cultural charge.

Through the Eyes of Others

This section of the essay explores how utilising charged matter can shape the finished artwork, underscoring the importance of material awareness in artistic production. This is achieved by discussing Jafa's work in relation to Danish artist Cathrine Raben Davidsen, who represents an artistic practice engaged with similar themes as Jafa, only she creates paintings from traditional materials absent of charge, illustrating the impact of charged matter on the finished artwork.

The charged matter composing *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, imbues the work with its cultural connections as a spectral presence. Jafa utilises pre-existing cultural "objects" as

charged matter to examine how Black Americans are depicted in media, and how their bodies are represented and made visible by an *other*. American sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Dubois (1868–1963) reflects on this reality in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), explaining this feeling of otherness, which arises from perceiving oneself through the eyes of another:

> *A world which yields him [the racialised individual] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double–consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (2018, p. 3).*

This image, 'amused contempt and pity', is quite striking, harrowingly poetic, and an accurate description of how the racialised individual is depicted in Jafa's images. Here, their existence becomes a form of entertainment. This critical perspective is realised through the utilisation of charged matter, whose properties give force to Jafa's artistic critique. As such, the ability to engage reliably with these themes can be contingent on the presence of charged matter. This becomes clear when works, absent of charged matter, are analysed alongside works wherein they are present. Perhaps the most notorious example of this is the American artist Dana Schutz and the scandal surrounding her painting *Open Casket* (2017), which depicts an abstract interpretation of the image of lynched American teenager Emmett Till's mutilated face at his open casket funeral. Schutz's abstract depiction of his face was criticised by American artist Hannah Black in an open letter. Here she stated that:

> *Although Schutz's intention may be to present white shame, this shame is not correctly represented as a painting of a dead Black boy by a white artist — those non-Black artists who sincerely wish to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material. The subject matter is not Schutz's; white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights. The painting must go (Black & Greenberger, 2017).*

Black frames Schutz's painting as utilising 'Black pain as raw material,' her critique being that the painting engages with a charged subject in a neutral way, and that Schutz depicts it as if it were a traditional subject, which it is not.

Another example is found in the works of Danish artist Cathrine Raben Davidsen. In her retrospective *Let Everything Happen to You* at Copenhagen Contemporary (2024), she exhibited several paintings of disfigured victims of war – limp bodies, empty eyes and the aftermath of violence. One of these paintings, *Grace* (2016), is based on the image of a Syrian woman who survived an acid attack. However, the work does not tell her story; the source material is obscured by artistic style and interpretation. The wounds on her face are rendered in a soft



Fig. 4: *Exhibition poster.*

magenta against her blue skin. The violence endured by this woman is transformed into a beautiful image. The link between image and lived trauma is severed. Instead of exposing oppression, the painting becomes a splendid abstraction detached from its context, which obscures the ties to the violence experienced by its subject.

As Black also notes, the intentions of Schutz and Davidsen could have been similar to Jafa's: to display horrors, form contemplation, and challenge the societal structures that enable such atrocities. However, this was not the function of the paintings themselves. In part, this is due to the lack of charged matter, as the subject becomes distilled through the artist's perspective and reflects the artist's inner life rather than the events it depicts. The work is therefore no longer primarily concerned with the real-life horror of the victim it depicts, but with the emotional response of the artist, using 'pain as raw material' as Black writes (2017). The discrepancy of importance between the artist's emotional reaction to suffering and the actual suffering is substantial; thus, the artworks appear cynical and distant, as erasures of pain.

It's important to note that the materials utilised by an artist are naturally not the sole determinant in this matter – identity and lived experiences are also significant. Jafa lives within the culture he depicts, as he is a part of the society producing these medialised objects. He is a Black American man, and he works with a material that is relevant to his own lived experiences. He emphasises this by including private footage in his artwork, such as a video from his daughter's wedding. In contrast, Davidsen, a Danish painter, experiences the war crimes in Syria through the media. Would there be a similar critique of Schultz or Davidsen if they used images as charged matter? They would still be outside of the events they portray, distant observers, *others* outside of the struggle they depict. However, they could not be accused of wrongly representing their subjects. I suspect that the reason why they didn't use the actual material is

that these would be too *real*, too affective, and the artists perhaps felt a need to dull the effects of the images before they could work with them. Conversely, this leads to the lack of a potent critique in their work.

This anaesthetisation of the subject is evident in the institutional use of Davidsen's work. The artist's mode of representation had rendered the image of the suffering woman consumable, enabling the exhibiting institution (Copenhagen Contemporary) to reproduce *Grace* as a poster (Fig. 4), feature the painting as the exhibition's web banner, and use it on the invitation to the opening party on Instagram (Fig. 5). Across the sorrowful eyes of the mutilated woman reads the enthusiastic invitation to Davidsen's exhibition opening, 'WE ARE SO EXCITED TO SEE YOU ALL NEXT THURSDAY FOR THE GRAND DOUBLE OPENING'. The work did not make visible the atrocities experienced by the civilian public in Syria: it obscured them. This exemplifies how an image unrooted in the events it depicts can be transformed into an enjoyable and usable form, altering the horrible image into a beautiful picture, leaving the suffering bodies behind. This case shows the importance of presence, of an artistic attention towards the subject matter and the method of representation in artistic depictions, and how charged matter can still haunt an artwork even in its absence.



Fig. 5: *Personal screenshot of Instagram post from Copenhagen Contemporary.*

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List of figures

Fig. 1-3: Arthur Jafa, Love is the Message, The Message is Death (2022). Installation view, The Douglas Hyde Gallery of Contemporary Art, Dublin. © *Arthur Jafa. Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery. Photo: Louis Haugh.*

Fig. 4: Exhibition poster. *Photo: A. Kierkegaard.*

Fig. 5: Personal screenshot of Instagram post from Copenhagen Contemporary. *Photo: A. Kierkegaard.*

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Essay: Theory in the Context of Danish Marine Archaeological Practice

Mads Bloch Kristiansen

Keywords: *History; Viking ship; Stone Age; Tybrind Vig; Skuldelev Ships; Marine Archaeology*

Abstract

Marine archaeology is a relatively new branch of archaeology that only in the mid-1900s became an academic field of study. This period of pioneering was especially prominent in Denmark. Two great excavations would dominate the field and develop the methods and theories for marine and experimental maritime archaeology. My question is, how have marine archaeological methods and theory developed in Denmark, and does the theoretical framework, or methodology, in marine archaeology fit with the methods after 60 years of development? I have come to this conclusion after analysing the development of theory and methods within marine archaeology, with reference to the excavations of the Skuldelev ships and Tybrind Vig, the current stage of modern marine archaeology and the theory in experimental maritime archaeology. The excavations and academic development have made marine archaeology a strong academic discipline with advanced methods in a dialectic and holistic methodology of natural science and humanistic understanding. I believe the current development should continue as it is, to learn as much about the past with the best scientific grounding to combat misinformation.

Introduction

Marine archaeology is a relatively new branch of archaeology, only becoming a proper academic field in the mid-to-late 1900s (Bass, 2012, pp. 5-6). This pioneering period was especially important for Danish archaeology. Two underwater discoveries, and their subsequent excavations, would not only expand our knowledge of Danish history and prehistory, but also develop the discipline itself in method and theory.

But being an offshoot of archaeology from over 60 years ago, have the methods of marine archaeology outdated the theoretical framework, or methodology, for the interpretation of the excavated material? Has the theory developed within marine archaeology, and does it properly interpret the materials found underwater? Is there a disconnect between method and theory? And what part has marine archaeology in Denmark played in this development?

To find the answers to these questions, I will try to answer an overarching question: How have marine archaeological methods and theory developed in Denmark, and does the methodology properly interpret the archaeological material from the methods? I will first go over how the theories and methods used within marine archaeology came to be, and how that could have possibly led to misinterpretations of human history. I will do so while relating the issue to the development of marine archaeology in Denmark, including the excavations of the Skuldelev Ships and Tybrind Vig that defined the field and its theories. I will then describe marine archaeological method and theory as they are today, and how theory and interpretation could be developed in the future. I will end with a conclusion on the state of marine archaeology then and now. Then I will give my suggestions on the challenges of the methodology. It is important to note that "proper interpretation" will always be up for debate, and this is only my conclusion on the topic. This essay is an adapted version of an unpublished paper from the course in Scandinavian Archaeology at the University of Copenhagen (Kristiansen, 2023).

Theory within Marine Archaeology

In archaeology, theory is the framework archaeologists use to interpret material into conclusions about the past. The late Colin Renfrew defines it as "…a means to make explicit the assumptions and models used to understand material evidence and to reconstruct the past" (Renfrew, 2024, p. 12). Matthew Johnson describes how theory is a difficult word to define, but can be explained as "…the order we put facts in" (2021).

He explains how facts put in a certain order answer why a site was elected for excavation, and how material facts are silent about the past without theory to create a "…meaningful account of the past" from those facts (Johnson, 2025; Johnson, 2021, pp. 2-7). These theories can be used as lenses to look at material from different viewpoints of study. Different questions can

then be asked of the same material to create multiple interpretations. This understanding of theory in archaeology fits under the term *methodology*, which is "…the theoretical framework to support the methods chosen. It is a perspective taken on the research, which dictates how it is approached" (UWA, 2025, pp. 1).

Theory in marine archaeology took off from the theories of general archaeology in the pioneering period of the 1960s and forward. The most prominent theory of that time was called *processualism* (Ravn, 2014, p. 53; Flor, 2005, pp. 62-63). Processualism, earlier called *new archaeology*, focused on cultural evolution, systems thinking, adaptation to the external environment and the cultural process of past human cultures. All of this with an emphasis on the scientific approach and variability of archaeological sites, while also being transparent about their biases and aims (Johnson, 2021, pp. 25-29, 33). The scientific approach in processualism followed the positivistic ideal of science. This ideal stated that a hypothesis about the past should be tested with measurable data to draw generalised conclusions, much like the development of natural science (Johnson, 2021, pp. 42-45; Ravn, 2014, p. 53; Flor, 2005, pp. 62-63; Beck, 2011, p. 168).

Processualism, and its positivistic ideal, came under criticism in the 1980s when it was argued that a strict insistence on objective data could not create objective statements on ancient society and culture (Ravn, 2014, p. 53; Johnson, 2021, pp. 46-53). The critics argued that human behaviour and societal thoughts were, and are, too complicated to be properly understood with measurements. These critiques, and subsequent theories, would be categorized under the umbrella term *post-processualism* (Ravn, 2014, p. 53; Olsen, 1997, pp. 59-67). Post-processualism works from an ideal of interpretation, with the understanding that archaeologists are people with individual prejudices derived from their own lives (Beck, 2011, pp. 183-184; Brattli & Johnsen, 1991, p. 49; Black Trowel Collective et al., 2024, p. 137). This undermines the processual ideal of objective truth discovered by archaeological science and moves the aim of archaeology from explaining the past to understanding the past (Beck, 2011, pp. 183-184).

Marine archaeology, or underwater archaeology (Bass, 2012, p. 4), is the study and excavation of human remains and artefacts found underwater. This academic discipline is furthermore divided into other branches like coastal archaeology, maritime archaeology, nautical archaeology and deep-submergence archaeology (Bass, 2012, p. 4). Because of the natural barrier of water between the archaeologist and the material, this field of archaeology could only be possible after the invention of stable diving equipment (Bass, 2012, p. 5).

Diving is an endeavour that requires the diver to understand the physics of water, gases and the human body to function properly and not risk terminal damage. Underwater archaeology combines diving with excavation, salvaging and conservation, all of which require precise mathematical calculations of physics, for the equipment and the archaeological material.

The processual theory became a significant part of nautical archaeology, or ship archaeology, with the studies of ship reconstruction and experimental maritime archaeology. The need for extensive measurements in reconstruction and the experiments in experimental maritime archaeology came naturally to processual theory with its positivistic ideal (Beck, 2011, p. 168; Ravn et al., 2012, p. 233; Lemée, 2006, p. 97). This specific research is a big part of Danish marine archaeology, which ties back to one of my two excavation examples.

The Skuldelev Ships

Danish marine archaeology started in 1957 when the National Museum of Denmark assigned Olaf Olsen and Ole Crumlin-Pedersen the job of investigating and mapping out a sailing lane in Roskilde Fjord named Peberrende Channel (Crumlin-Pedersen, 2010, pp. 20-21). They concluded that they had found the wrecks of six (in truth, five) sunken ships from the mid-1000s (Crumlin-Pedersen, 2010, pp. 20-22). This would be the very first archaeological underwater excavation in Denmark, and it facilitated the very first Danish law for the protection of historical shipwrecks and more in 1963.

The archaeologists constructed a cofferdam around the Skuldelev Ships in 1962 (Crumlin-Pedersen, 2010, p. 22). It allowed for the draining of the water with pumps, thus creating a small dry area in the fjord for excavation. They excavated the ships and took extensive measurements before they preserved them with polyethene glycol for exhibition at the new Roskilde Viking Ship Museum. The museum would go on to be a centre of marine-, maritime- and experimental archaeology for Denmark and the world (Crumlin-Pedersen, 2010, pp. 22-26).

The Tybrind Vig Excavation

This was the first extensive and systematic excavation of an underwater settlement from the Danish Stone Age (Dal, 2014, p. 7). It was a new method of excavation for the archaeologists and divers of that time, and the methods, equipment and work structure they developed would be used in future excavations of underwater Stone Age settlements (Dal, 2014, p. 8).

The excavation began officially in 1978 and concluded in 1987, but the first steps began in 1957 when the magazine *Hjemmet* sponsored a competition in cooperation with the National Museum (Dal, 2014, pp. 15-17, 32, 37, 147). This competition encouraged all scuba divers in Denmark to find the oldest possible submarine Stone Age settlement in Denmark (Dal, 2014, pp. 15-17). The divers Hans Find Larsen and his partner Knud Pihl found Stone Age material in Tybrind Vig (Dal, 2014, p. 19). The competition spread the method of scuba diving in marine archaeology, and a scuba club from Vejle searched Tybrind Vig again in 1970.

They found more Stone Age material and contacted the Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus (Dal, 2014, pp. 19-29). This became a partnership between the local museums and scuba divers to excavate Tybrind Vig. The divers were taught archaeology and developed methods of underwater excavation with custom-made methods and equipment (Dal, 2014, pp. 28-85). The Tybrind Vig project ended in August 1987, and it would only be the beginning of dedicated submarine excavations on Danish Stone Age settlements. The technique and tools for precise submarine excavation were invented, and the project was great news both locally and internationally. This spread recognition and wider support for the field of marine archaeology (Dal, 2014, pp. 97-101).

Danish Marine Archaeology Today

Today, Danish marine archaeology is still going strong. It has been leading in the field for years because of its ideal geography and the number of enthusiastic divers working in cooperation with archaeologists (Dal, 2014, p. 135; Fischer, 2001, p. 2). The Danish territorial waters contain around 20.000 registered wrecks from different vehicles. These are positioned on maps in databases open to the public by the Ministry of Culture and others (Bangsbo, 2022; Kulturministeriet, 2025 (2); Vragguiden, 2023). There are, furthermore, at least 2300 registered Stone Age sites located underwater around the Danish coasts (Fischer, 2001, p. 3). This large amount of archaeological material underwater has encouraged the organised development of marine archaeology in Denmark, with the waters of Denmark divided into archaeological jurisdictions between multiple museums. (Dal, 2014, p. 30; Kulturministeriet, 2023).

Internationally, marine archaeology is a well-respected academic discipline with dedicated university courses around the world (Bass, 2012, p. 8). International cooperation has made marine archaeology a dynamic field of shared methods and theories. Students are taught many related topics outside diving and archaeology, such as historical seafaring, palaeography for archival studies, technical knowledge for model construction and laboratory work, and the legal codes regarding marine archaeology (Bass, 2012, p. 8).

Sadly, in Denmark, the only master's degree course in marine archaeology closed in 2020 (Pedersen & Kristiansen, 2017). Marine archaeology can be practised by combining an archaeological degree with a certificate in industrial diving. Several technological tools like sonar, GPS, metal detectors, underwater vehicles and digital 3D modelling and measuring programs are also used in marine archaeology (Tuttle, 2012, pp. 118, 124-125; Wachsmann, 2012, p. 212). The use of 3D models and measurements would especially figure in the field of archaeology, most studied at the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum. A field where the criticisms of processual theory would be significant. The field of experimental maritime archaeology.

Theory of Experimental Maritime Archaeology

After the Skuldelev Ships were excavated and measured, a new field of experimental ship reconstruction was created at the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum (Crumlin-Pedersen, 2010, p. 22). The number of different types of ships, and the well-preserved material, allowed for archaeologists and craftspeople to create full-scale reconstructions using materials, tools and techniques authentic to the time the original ships were built in (Crumlin-Pedersen, 2010, p. 22). The reconstruction using authentic techniques, combined with experimental sailing, is meant to give new practical knowledge and perspective on how people back then did it, and what it required of them to do so (Crumlin-Pedersen, 2010, pp. 32-40; Ravn et al., 2012, p. 244). Experimental archaeology is a useful method to study a variety of topics in archaeology. Its foundation in processual theory, of stringent measuring of everything possible as a basis for interpretation, could arguably mark it as a processual method of archaeology (Ravn, 2014, p. 53).

Anna Severine Beck, PhD, Danish archaeologist at Museum Southeast Denmark (Kulturministeriet, 2025 (1); 2011,167), explains that the processual methodology in overall experimental archaeology did not change with the shift from processualism to post-processualism. This was, according to her, due to and a product of the lack of theoretical debate within experimental archaeology, which led to experiments being based on a post-processual framework but still judged by the positivistic ideal (Beck, 2011, pp. 167-168). This lack of development, and its subsequent disagreements, in the methodology would last from about the 1980s to the 2000s, until Marianne Rasmussen published a new model for experimental archaeology in 2001 (Rasmussen, 2001; Beck, 2011, p. 168).

This model explains experimental archaeology as having two separate approaches: One *controlled* approach, which focuses on isolating as many variables as possible to create repeating results to prove or disprove hypotheses. And one *contextual* approach, which keeps variables in the experiment to create further inspiration and argumentation to evaluate the relevance of the context (Rasmussen, 2001, p. 6; Ravn, 2014, p. 54; Beck, 2011, pp. 181-182). Anna Beck (2011, p. 183) elaborates how the two approaches each have their origins in processual theory (controlled approach) and post-processual theory (contextual approach).

Morten Ravn, Danish archaeologist (Ravn, 2014, p. 54), adds that no experiments within experimental archaeology have only one of these two approaches, but that they usually lean more toward one or the other. He finally concludes that whether an experiment leans towards one of the two approaches, it must still start from the archaeological material and be in dialogue or *dialectical* with other research on society and culture. All in a dynamic process based on *sense* and *reason* (Ravn, 2014, p. 54).

The lack of theoretical debate in experimental archaeology until that point did not impede the development of its methods and principles. Experimental archaeology as a field has developed strong methods and principles, based on defined academic processes, multidisciplinary craftsmanship, and evidence recorded as precisely as possible (Coates et al., 1995; Crumlin-Pedersen, 1995). Ravn, M., Bischo, V., Englert, A. & Nielsen, S. (2012, 233) compare the late Welsh naval architect John Coates' (1995) and Crumlin-Pedersen's (1995) methodologies in experimental archaeology. Coates et al. (1995) follow the principles of natural science with the test of a hypothesis, and Crumlin-Pedersen (1995) is focused on creating a plan of research to lay down the potential of the experiment.

Ravn (2012, 233) then elaborates on the potential issues in the interrelations between craftmanship and recorded archaeological evidence, bringing up the disconnect between the ancient tradition of shipbuilding, which created the ships, and modern shipbuilding with archaeological reconstruction (Eldjarn, 2008; Andersen et al., 2005). This harkens back to the critiques of processual theory; how human culture could not be understood through theories of positivistic science alone. Ravn, M. (2014, 53) describes this issue further by mentioning a rising critique against experimental archaeology from the 1990s into the 2000s. This critique was of experimental archaeology's tendency to lean too much into the methods of natural science without considering the human experience, comparable to past human experiences, from the experiments (Ravn, 2014, p. 54). This issue would be addressed with Rasmussen's model.

Future Development of Marine Archaeology

The descriptions of theory within experimental archaeology are from publications almost a decade old as of writing, but the same framework holds true for the works on the ships in the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum. The experimental archaeology at Roskilde Viking Ship Museum studies the cultural process, environmental adaptation and systems of construction for the Viking ships. This would be in line with processualism. This methodology and the surrounding debate are appropriate for experimental maritime archaeology, but they seem disconnected from the methods used in excavation.

The post-processual theory is about interpretation, but how can one make interpretations without some kind of baseline to work from? This baseline can be established with the positivistic ideal of a framework of natural science with controlled environments, proven methods of measurement and quantifiable results. But on the other hand, the positivistic ideal is an ideal, and the criticisms against it as the be-all and end-all in archaeological theory are valid. The processual theory could seem to have been tied closer to the practical application of archaeology, while post-processualism applies more to theoretical archaeology.

Anna Beck (2011, 192) describes how the lack of debate about theory within experimental archaeology was likely primarily because the archaeologists interested in excavations and practical work are often not the same archaeologists interested in theory and interpretation. Of course, most professional archaeologists work in both the practical and the theoretical fields, but they do more practical archaeology proportioned to the theoretical. Just like how a project in experimental archaeology would lean into one or the other of the two approaches in Rasmussen's model, so too do archaeologists usually lean into either practical or theoretical work.

In marine archaeology, fieldwork demands more technological equipment and more skill of the archaeologist than excavations on land, due to the work's nature of being underwater. As was explained by Hans Dal, a Danish amateur marine archaeologist (Dal, 2025; 2014, 40), the conditions and need for precise and controlled work demanded comprehensive skills and high workloads in both archaeology and diving. These practical aspects are, in my own experience, the main reason for new archaeologists to choose to work in marine archaeology, rather than its theory of interpretation. This is especially true for those enthusiastic divers interested in archaeology, as Dal (2014, 135) mentioned. These factors explain the disconnect. But it should not be accepted as inevitable. Especially since the holistic and dialectic symbiosis produces the most inclusive and contextual conclusions.

The methodology for marine archaeology is not particularly different from terrestrial archaeology, since the different environments of excavation only really change the method of excavation. The environment is a crucial detail in the context of the material and its history, but it has little impact on the overall theory of interpretation. What has an impact on theory is the societal context of the archaeologist at the time of excavation and documentation. Archaeological theory changes over time in academia, and this is because society changes with time. People and ideas change over generations, and with them change the questions we ask from the archaeological material. This was the same with the change from processual to post-processual theory. That period in history was a time of change in the societal understanding of people and social equality. The idea of *people* became more nuanced, and therefore so did the answers we sought from the past reflect this societal shift. This is a continuing process in archaeology (Black Trowel Collective et al., 2024; Sonne, 2021; Price, 2010).

Modern archaeological theory continues the search for a holistic understanding of the past, with more focus on phenomena like ancient climate changes, migration and long-distance trade, mirroring our modern society. This, of course, has a more practical element in where the funding lies, but funding and pure academic interest are both susceptible to contemporary society, and one driving force does not need to exclude the other in motivating the topics of study (Black Trowel Collective et al., 2024). I believe that we should strive for the most holistic picture of the past when we are interpreting archaeological material.

I want to know and understand as much as possible from the material of the past, and every new idea and angle in interpretation that could lead to more knowledge is welcome. I welcome every new angle of interpretation if it works from meticulous and proven measurements and documentation of the archaeological material. This foundation of traditional reason is important from a scientific and societal standpoint.

A current trend in modern society is the spread of politically and financially motivated misinformation and pseudoscience. This has led to disbelief in certain proven theories that contradict some political and monetary agendas, and a push for those with such agendas to try and take control of scientific research. This is completely against ethical scientific method and theory, and it is therefore important that all research and conclusions must be as provable as possible to stand against misinformation. This is even more important in archaeological theory because the past and the control thereof have long been important to justify national identity, the state and political movements (Black Trowel Collective et al., 2024, p. 138). These can have deadly consequences for people, and it is the archaeologist who finds the evidence, interprets it and, most importantly, communicates with the public.

We, as archaeologists, have a duty not only to find and preserve the past but also to teach the public how the past truly was, as best we can. We do this by reaching out and teaching in engaging ways that capture the interest and imagination of the audience. Like when we create museums dedicated not only to the preservation and display of remarkably well-preserved ships but also to the reconstruction of these ships using the methods of ancient people and sailing them as they did back then. Or when museums team up with the enthusiastic population to discover new archaeological sites and materials and evolve the field of marine archaeology in the process.

Conclusion

For this paper, I wanted to study the methodology within marine archaeology. I wanted to study the research history of marine archaeology in Denmark, learn about the methods and theories used, and give my suggestions on how its methods and theories could be developed in the future. I asked how marine archaeological methods and theory have developed in Denmark, and whether the methodology properly interprets the archaeological material from the methods.

Through this paper, I found that marine archaeology started with a processual method and theory in the 1950s-60s, based on a positivistic ideal of science. It then changed through the 1980s to having a post-processual theory more inclined towards understanding and the subjective experience. The method in marine archaeology stayed processual because of the required technology and natural scientific method in submarine excavations.

Marine archaeology in Denmark started in 1957 with both the survey of Roskilde Fjord and the competition posted by Hjemmet-magazine to encourage scuba divers to discover Stone Age material underwater. Both were organised by the National Museum of Denmark. One led to the discovery of five Viking ships in good condition. This became the basis for one of the great centres of marine archaeology and experimental maritime archaeology in Denmark. The other would lead to a great pioneering underwater excavation of a Stone Age settlement in Tybrind Vig. This and further work have left marine archaeology as a strong academic discipline with advanced methods and a dialectic and holistic methodology of interpretation. International scholarship has furthermore shared the advances in Danish marine archaeology with the rest of the world. I believe that it should continue to advance its methods and theory to further our knowledge and understanding of the past while basing its interpretations on reasonable and well-documented data. This should be done to combat potential misinformation and bring more people into the exciting field of marine archaeology.

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About the author

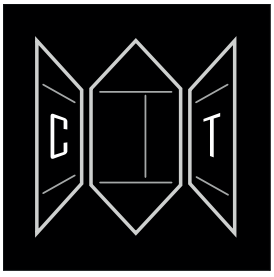


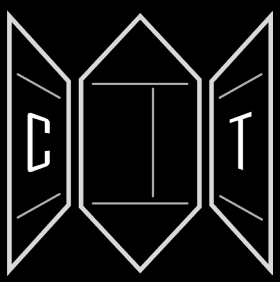
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Mads Kristiansen is a certified marine archaeologist and commercial diver. He is a board member of Marinarkæologisk Udvalg (MAU), Dansk Sportsdykkerforbund (DSF), the student association Københavns Universitets Marinarkæologiske Gruppe (KUMAG) and the scuba diving club Kon-Tiki in Brøndby. Mads Kristiansen is also a member of the archaeological association KonfliktArkæologisk Møde og Præsentation (K.A.M.P).

Mads Kristiansen is very passionate about archaeology, history and diving. It was his interest in these subjects that inspired him to participate in the journal Curious Things, and here publish an essay on danish marine archaeology. The essay is based on an assignment he wrote during the master's degree course Scandinavian Archaeology. With this essay, Mads Kristiansen hopes to share his own curiosity and excitement for marine archaeology with as many as possible.


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