

English Summaries

Trends and results in Danish rural archaeology

By Nils Engberg

Interest in the village and especially in farm-buildings from early historical and prehistoric times developed at the end of the last century among historians who attempted, by means of studying existing farmyards, to describe the development of the farm in time and space.

In the 1920s and 30s, when archaeologists began in earnest to carry out excavations of house-sites from the prehistoric periods, this led to ambitions of testing out the theories about the development of the farm in historic time using archaeological material. Axel Steensberg undertook this task; from the end of the 30s until well into the 50s he excavated a number of very different farm-constructions. This pioneering contribution was not followed up immediately, however; it was not until the 1980s that medieval archaeologists took up the subject again, inspired by a settlement-project at Odense University, involving cultural geographers and historians interested in archaeology, with the focus on the medieval village and its development until the land-law reforms around 1800.

This project on Funen, entitled »The origins and development of the village«, exercised great influence on the research-strategy behind the archaeological excavations of the medieval village carried out in the 1980s. Small-scale limited investigations in existing villages were a popular form of excavation throughout the 80s, aiming at establishing when the site of the village in question became stable. The results were not unambiguous, but - in spite of the lack of a general perspective of the whole farm-sites - the investigations indicate that there was a tendency throughout the Middle Ages to gather the farm buildings together into structures with several wings. There were no excavations which exposed complete village sites, and for

that reason the pattern of movements of individual farms to and from the thorp cannot yet be established. Some investigations suggest that village re-alignments in the late Middle Ages, or sudden disasters (war, fire) might have led to movements of whole villages.

Considerable variations can be observed in the building-customs used for the houses. These differences are functionally-determined, but no doubt are also the result of regional variations.

In recent years it has become fashionable to investigate large farms - »local potentate's farms«. This has developed in the neighbourhood of churches because of theories about a connection between farm and church. So far only a few investigations have produced positive and unequivocal results. A labyrinth of ditches has been observed in the course of several of the larger excavations. Experience from defining the boundaries of churchyards suggests that if we can learn to interpret these stretches of ditch we will also be able to establish the boundaries of individual farmyards.

In the coming years it will be necessary to concentrate on excavating whole village sites (hundreds of them were abandoned in the 16th to 18th centuries) and entire farm-sites in order to supply answers to the issues outlined above. Interdisciplinary projects will also be required, with the aim of initiating study of the medieval rural economy, possibly using methods established in research of the Norse settlements in Greenland.

Farm, Croft and Hide A Small Excavation in the Village of Vester Vedsted south west of Ribe

By Per Kristian Madsen

Vester Vedsted is situated on the edge of the marshes, some eight kilometres from Ribe (fig. 1). The present plan of the village (fig.

2a) shows its Late Romanesque church (fig. 3) on the western outskirts of the village. East of the church two rows of farms running east-west demarcate a fairly large open field at the centre of the village. Historical research traces this plan back to the Middle Ages (fig. 2b). The open field was the village common green. Its western side was divided into three smaller fields. These belonged to the three farms situated just south of the open green. The age of this lay-out of the village is unknown. A small excavation on the western part of the green revealed two medieval houses and a medieval well (fig. 4-5 & 6). These were erected no earlier than ca. 1200, and possibly as late as the 14th century. Assuming that these houses were older than the known extent of the village green would suggest that the green, as well as the general lay-out of the village, should be dated to the Late Middle Ages.

Middle Age Farms and Crofts in the Esbjerg Region

By Palle Siemen

Investigations carried out through the 1980's and into the 1990's of Prehistoric and Middle Age settlements, undermine the orthodox view that the Esbjerg region was almost uninhabited prior to the ruling on Esbjerg harbour in 1865, which in turn gave rise to this, the 5th largest town in Denmark.

Archaeological examinations of the Middle Age settlements were undertaken entirely as urgent excavations and the material is as such somewhat diverse (disparate). Investigations were undertaken both in villages and solitary farms (part 2).

Solitary farms can be divided into multi-phase farms and those of single phase. Two solitary farms in several phases lie on the edge of the marshes east and west of Tjæreborg and are both characterized by noticeable croft-ditches; the same applies to a solitary farm at Hjemsted in south-Jutland. The single phase solitary farm, for example; Præstestien in Tobøl, north of Esbjerg shows little sign of actual croft borders, let alone of fencing which indicates that in early on there was probably little reason to demarcate a particular area here. It is presumed also that croft-marking was of particular use in regions where several farms shared an interest in resources (part 3).

Investigations were undertaken in 5 villages, of which 4 are located in a relatively smaller area east of Esbjerg: Novrup, Tovrup,

Allerup and Tjæreborg. A 5th unnamed village lies ca. 25 km east of Esbjerg. Two of the settlements (Tovrup and the unnamed one) were destroyed in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, while the remaining 3 continued up to the present (part 4).

In the sections on the solitary farms and villages, presentation of the individual excavations include plans of houses from the individual locations. The individual farms are demarcated where possible. Included among the houses are single chamber curved walled houses, single chamber houses with straight walls, trapeze-shaped smaller houses as well as single hitherto unseen house forms as found at Præstestien, Allerup and Jens Kuskvej in Tjæreborg.

The village excavations are characterized by a large number of layouts, of which house plans and wells for example have generally been given a high priority. The large areas covered in Tjæreborg, Tovrup and at Vejrup have shown that the numerous trenches which in actual fact impact on the excavation sites in the villages deserve further investigation. The majority of these ditches can be taken as boundary trenches between the individual crofts, and the large number of them testifies to numerous stable phases in the demarcation of individual crofts, but also to the regulation which was applied to the crofts of the individual farms.

The croft ditches often appear as 0,5-1,0 m wide, u-shaped ditches; the underground depth varies regularly in the case of Tovrup, or according to the terrain, as in Tjæreborg. This type of layout shows up apparently around the 1100's and continues to a time in the 1800's when other boundary demarcations appear.

Demarcation of the individual farm and the structuring of this is of great value in forming a general view of a settlement, but these things have not been given the priority they deserve in relation to, for example house plans and fine wells. One of the most important aims in future excavations of Middle Age settlements ought, where possible to be covering the settlements as whole entities.

Buried Posts, Sills and other »earthly« Building Objects in Skast District 1636-1800

By Henrik Vensild

From 1969 to 1971 the author examined the court books of Skast District in south west Jutland; as well as those of a number of other

archives from the region. The result of this was a Masters dissertation in European Ethnology in 1972 entitled: »Farmsteads in Skast District 1636-1760, their building methods and lay-outs.« Examples are presented here of »earthly« building constructions drawn from this rich source of material.

It appears that buried wall posts were still used, often with sills in between some buildings; also, that posts with ground plate »lejder« stays were used in others. Occasionally several construction forms were used in the same building. In general there was a much wider use of timber and in-filling with timber in the construction, to be replaced by intertie and baluster in the 1600's than in the next century.

During the crisis years in the middle of the 1600's, war and plague, crop failure and cattle sickness caused devastation. In southern Jutland in particular a proportion of the population died and many farms were as a result left desolate or in decay. There was a shortage of wood which made it necessary to scavenge timber from existing objects in order to carry out repairs to the buildings. New buildings were also built from old material if it was impossible to obtain new timber.

The buried posts lasted longer if they were supported on stone. This is referred to directly in the court books: »Posts which are rotted away at the ground surface, can be raised on stone and function perfectly«. The use of ground timber, sills and ground plate »lejder« also receded. In times of wood shortage these were avoided, in that one had to compensate by using old timber, especially old posts as either sills or ground plate »lejder«.

By the middle of the 1700's baked bricks began to make ground; at first this was as outer casing in the squares of timber houses, but was later used directly in the foundation. This marked the end of half-timbering in this region.

There is a question as to whether the archeological data reflects these changes; from buried posts to stone mounted posts; sills and ground plate »lejder«, as well as the matter of moving buildings, or using parts of them for repairs?

There is another relatively important problem for the archeologists: Many farms in the 1600's were shared among a number of users. These users often kept their buildings separated; often each one would occupy their own east or west side of a single building. They might have common northern and southern wings. The users could also have their buildings mixed together so that they each occupied a part of all of the farms' wings. Can

we confirm this multiplicity when we are interpreting the excavations?

Medieval Houses. Recent Excavations near Køge

By Ulla Fraes Rasmussen

Over the last 15 years a number of medieval houses around the country have been excavated; near Køge, houses from eight villages and from six sites in the town itself. An investigation of almost 80 houses shows that medieval houses with buried, load-bearing posts can be classified into two main types: ones with two inner rows, ones with posts in the outer walls, and ones with one row in the middle of the house. In addition there are smaller pit houses and barns. Compared to prehistoric houses, the ones without inner posts were a new type, which quickly became the most common one. The sizes of the different types appear in the table, (fig. 13). The medieval houses were generally smaller, because by then outhouses were being built for separate functions. In the thirteenth century, stones began to be used in foundations, but the custom of building with buried load-bearing posts continued into the seventeenth century. Houses for the upper class on the other hand, were bigger and much more solidly built and were often stone houses. There is an apparent similarity in the ground plans of houses across the country, but regional differences, known from later farmhouses, can perhaps already be seen in the Middle Ages.

Stability – Instability. Thoughts on the Middle Age Village Tårnby

By Ditlev L. Dall Mahler

During the spring and summer of 1993-94, excavations were carried out in the oldest part of the village of Tårnby. These revealed

the central remains of a Medieval and post-Reformation farmstead. The area investigated amounted to 5.000 square metres and included large areas with well-preserved cultural layers of up to 1.5 m above subsoil. Due to the thickness of the cultural layers, we decided to:

- a) Remove the uppermost 30 cm's of disturbed topsoil in order to investigate building remains dating from the mid-13th century to the 18th century.
- b) Thereafter remove the underlying layer of structure-free earth (a cultivation layer?) in order to register and investigate eventual remains to be found in the subsoil.

Almost all of the registered Medieval buildings and structures were found grouped together in the eastern part of the excavation area. These included earth-dug cellars, wells and fences as well as the remains of some thirty buildings. Characteristically, these structures all revealed a high degree of spatial continuity in marked contrast to their labile predecessors which date from the 11th and 12th century. Almost all of these buildings had well-preserved floor layers, were built on a base of foundation stones and had an inner structure based on post-bearing stones.

The find material is varied. Fairly cosmopolitan, though locally produced manufacture such as pottery and artifacts are well represented. Chosen floorlayers were both screened and sieved (with a net of 0,5 mm) resulting in a vast increase of our total faunal material, mainly in the shape of fishbones. A preliminary investigation of a few samples show the presence of small cod, flounder, dab, plaice, eel and heering. These were probably all caught by net-fishing off the flat western coast.

In phase b) the subsoil revealed the presence of a series of north-south orientated ditches varying in depth from 20-30 cm to up to 1m. In the westernmost part of the excavation area, one of the ditches investigated contained traces of a row of closely spaced posts or lathes; these were interpreted as the remains of a wattle-fence. In addition to the ditches we found traces of several both single and double-aisled dwelling houses as well as folds. These are interpreted as the remains of an early Medieval farmstead, although no readably datable artefact material has yet been forthcoming.

The difference between the high degree of spatial continuity displayed by the Medieval and post-Reformation farmstead as compared to the earlier, far more labile remains traced in the subsoil has given rise to a reevaluation of the development of early village settlements. By studying the cadastral maps from 1803-II

and the earlier property taxations from the 1680's, the following hypothesis is proposed: That the settlement of Tarnby village was originally composed of four large farmsteads. The settlement in itself becomes stationary sometime during the 11th century, while the actual farmsteads constituting the village become fixed or stationary within it's boundaries somewhat later, in the 13th century. The historically documented picture of Tarnby village, consisting of a main village street flanked by rows of fixed farmsteads is a much younger phenomenon. The validity of the above mentioned hypothesis rests on the correct interpretation of the subsoil remains as representing traces of the remains of one of the four earliest farmsteads.

Coastal settlements in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance – a comparative status for East Denmark

By Tommy P. Christensen

In these pages a suggestion is put forward for the distinction between two principally different types of coastal settlement, namely; the Privileged and the Unprivileged coastal settlement. The privileged coastal settlements of the Middle Ages were first and foremost the maritime towns. All other coastal settlements were commonly unprivileged. A royal letter dated 1536 which is reproduced here (supplement) illustrates the relationship between the unprivileged coastal settlements (Gilleleje and Villingebæk) and the privileged. Find material and traces of settlements from a number of coastal locations is presented and commented on with respect to dating, the construction forms employed and the function of the settlements type in Middle Age society. Finally it is suggested that it is only a small step to assume that trade was quite fundamental in the establishment and development of these coastal localities. Market trade, including the trade in fish and agricultural products with the german towns of the Baltic Sea and the archeological traces of these activities are crucial in deciding the relationship between the maritime market towns of the Late Middle Ages and other coastal settlements. A more complete comparison of east-danish coastal settlements in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance along with a closer

evaluation of their roles in the economy of society demands more archeological knowledge about such settlements than we possess today.

Farms from the Middle Ages on Bornholm

By Finn Ole Nielsen

Within the last fifteen years, a large amount of find material has been uncovered on Bornholm, which for the first time sheds some light on conditions in settlements in the Early Middle Ages. The picture of these settlements shows that within the period around 1000-1200 there were two major settlement shifts. The first change takes place in the course of the 1000's where parts of the settlements in many of the prehistoric settlement regions break up and a large number of farms are re-established. The second and more noticeable change comes around 1200, when a further proportion of the farms from the old Iron Age villages are moved and many of those re-located in the 1000's are moved again. It is only well into the 1200's, roughly contemporaneous with the end of stone church construction, that the settlement changes seem to be complete and the existing settlement picture is in place.

The extensive changes do not appear to have altered the structure of the settlements in themselves as single-farms and farm-rows, in that the settlement has a lot of features in common with the settlement structure familiar to us from history.

Single farm building can be traced all the way back to the time around the birth of Christ. There is however clearly a tendency in Iron Age building towards assemblage in concentrations of farms or villages. How much larger these were than the historically documented settlements of three close lying farms is as yet unknown.

The Early Middle Age is a time of expansion, and a time when the church was establishing itself, and the king was establishing his power. These changes had significant consequences on the local level in the farming communities. On Bornholm the new times gave rise to, among other things, an increase in production with the subsequent moving of farms. To what extent these reforms were regulated by the king or the church, or if they were carried out according to premisses established locally, is unclear at the present time. The construction of stone churches however, the division into parishes and the distribution of land to the priesthood,

might reflect a form of superior planning, not least on the basis of the numerous early christian burial sites which bear witness to the existence of an older church structure.

A closer analysis and definition of conditions on Bornholm in the Early Middle Ages might also be able to possibly elucidate conditions in the rest of the country.

House types in the Viking age and the Early Middle Ages – Development of house types in the old danish region from ca. 800-1200 a.d.

By Hans Skov

An examination of 171 locations from the Old Danish region with well defined ground plans for houses from the period 800-1200 A.D provide the basis for this article. The 171 locations which are considered to make up by far the majority of the uncovered material up to the autumn of 1993 provide a fairly good picture of house development in the period. House material from the early Viking era consists almost entirely of three chambered long houses and pit houses, while in the middle and late Viking era a series of new house types and construction trends are introduced. Houses with slanted braces along the walls (»Trelleborg-houses«), single chambered houses where the walls alone bear the roof, houses with projections and houses with foundation stones show up. There is a rise of central-pillar houses which begins in the Early Middle Ages. The bar charts in figs. 1-9 show the number of locations where the various house types/construction forms appear. The bar charts give a good representation of the appearance, peak and fall of a number of house types. Fig. 10 shows the demarcation of time with respect to the different house types. Fig. 11 shows the siting of the 171 locations. The map in fig. 11 should not be taken as being a representative picture of the intensity of excavations in the various parts of the country in the period in question. There is much to suggest that Jutland was a region of innovation for new house types that appeared in the Viking era. This should be seen against the background of close contacts which this part of the country had with the Carolingian Kingdom and Friesland. There is a catalogue to follow this article showing

the types of house and construction forms found at the various locations. Dating of the individual locations is also provided as are source references.

Maritime Aspects of Rural Settlements in the Danish Medieval Period

By Jan Bill

One goal behind the establishment of a Centre for Maritime Archaeology at the Danish National Museum was to strengthen research into the influence of maritime life on past societies in southern Scandinavia. One of the topics in focus is the maritime aspects of rural settlements in the Danish medieval period; several studies on this topic will be concluded during the years to come. The present article attempts to outline some of the problems and possibilities faced by those studies.

Apart from the possibilities offered by the sea in terms of trade and fishing, any society in a maritime environment has to deal with the challenge of communication over water. This is especially true for medieval Denmark because of its many straits and sounds. Any authority uniting different parts of Denmark was dependent on reliable communications – whether the authority would be the crown, the church or even the noble landlords. The process of specialisation of the trades was taking place in Medieval Denmark, but it was far from being complete. The rural population still played an important role in transport, both on land and at sea.

This situation was partly due to the fact that maritime technology, especially that in use in the fairly protected waters surrounding most of Denmark, was still fairly simple (fig. 1). According to written sources from the 12th and 13th century, peasants could be and were used in boat building. The maritime engagement was strongest in areas where local or regional transport routes met the sea; as

is the case in the southernmost part of the island of Falster and on the southwestern coast of the neighbouring island of Lolland. Here, written sources, as well as three finds of a specialized ship type adapted to the difficult coastal conditions, indicate a strong maritime involvement; partly due to a demand from the king (fig. 2). Rødby was one such case, where the maritime engagement actually led to it gradually attaining the status of a town.

The two examples given deal with regional traffic across the southwestern Baltic to northern Germany; from the northern part of Falster there is an example of a village with an apparent reference to a local transport fluctuation (fig. 3).

There are numerous references to illegal trading activities outside the town harbours in written sources from the 15th and 16th century. To some extent these point towards the landlords as being the perpetrators of this trade. Undoubtedly those activities reflect another maritime element in the life of the rural population, namely their function as the necessary barges and boatmen.

The military defence system of the early part of the Danish medieval period; the *leidang*, was a maritime transport system, based on the rural population.

The spatial distribution of the system suggests that the Herreds-division, is most likely to have had some influence on the settlement pattern, by concentrating resources from large areas at the mouth of the fjords. Very often, these places later became towns.

The article concludes that the maritime aspects of the medieval rural settlements in Denmark can be described as an hierarchy (fig. 4); with the exploration of maritime resources at the bottom, followed by trade and with political seafaring at the top. The intensity of investment and of written references as well as of previous archaeological interest increases towards the top of the hierarchy, while the personal engagement of the medieval farmer decreases in the same direction. Finally, it is pointed out that as well as there are no distinct borders drawn between the different levels, this hierarchy is a hierarchy of events, and that the same tools, sites and persons might be involved in events on several levels.