

Settlement Continuity in the Villages of Stevns, South-Eastern Zealand - an Archaeological Investigation

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the extensive excavations of Iron Age settlements and the investigations in Danish villages and towns have brought into focus the question of settlement continuity and its preconditions. Of central importance in this debate are the villages on Funen, where a number of excavations have demonstrated continuity of settlement as far as villages in North-West Funen from the Late Viking Age / Early Middle Ages are concerned (Grøngaard Jeppesen 1979).

Nowhere, neither on Funen nor in Jutland, does Iron Age settlement show an unbroken sequence into historic times. Matters are different on Zealand, where Iron Age settlement has not been demonstrated so far. There may be several reasons for this: traces of settlement sites may be too inconspicuous to be recognized in surface collections, or habitation layers may be "sealed" beneath collapsed mud walls and are now protected from the plough by the thickness of the top-soil. Finally, Iron Age settlements may lie immediately below present-day villages. A convincing statistical analysis of the comprehensive find material from graves belonging to the Roman Iron Age suggests a significant concentration of finds, as regards graves from the Late Roman Period, in the vicinity of villages with the following place-name suffixes: -inge, -lev, -løse and -sted (Nielsen 1978). This makes it likely that Iron Age settlements should be looked for within the present-day village boundaries or in their immediate vicinity (Nielsen 1978: 87).

In view of these considerations it was decided in the spring of 1979 to apply for a grant from the local councils of Stevns Municipality and Storstrøms County to finance a three-month investigation of the villages of Stevns as a joint project between Køge Museum and Stevns Museum (1). Stevns was selected as the area of

excavation on account of its heavy concentration of grave finds from the Late Roman Age, on which the place-name studies (Nielsen 1978) are chiefly founded. The same material is also the basis of the interpretation of Stevns as the focal point of an important political centralization (Hedeager 1980), an interpretation that is significant for an assessment of the results of the research.

The excavation was carried out according to the same methodological principles as were employed on Funen, i.e. by means of sampling (Grøngaard Jeppesen 1979 I). The randomly selected squares were laid out within the village boundaries as we know them from Denmark's earliest village maps (the "enclosure" maps from the late 18th century); the number varied between five and twelve for each site and the average size was 3 m × 1.25 m. A total of 80 squares were dug in the 9 villages (2). (figs. 1–2).

The selected sites fall into the following place-name groups: one with the suffix -inge (Lille Heddinge); three with -lev (Sigerslev, Varpelev and Gjorslev); one with -sted (Hellested); two with -by (Raaby and Magleby); one with -øje (Arnøje) and one with -høj (Holtug – the name being derived from *Holthøj*). Of these Lille Heddinge, Varpelev, Hellested, Magleby and Holtug are all church villages.

FIND MATERIAL

a) Pottery

This has been classified in accordance with the main categories of the material from Funen (Grøngaard Jeppesen 1979 II: 6–7), with some minor changes:

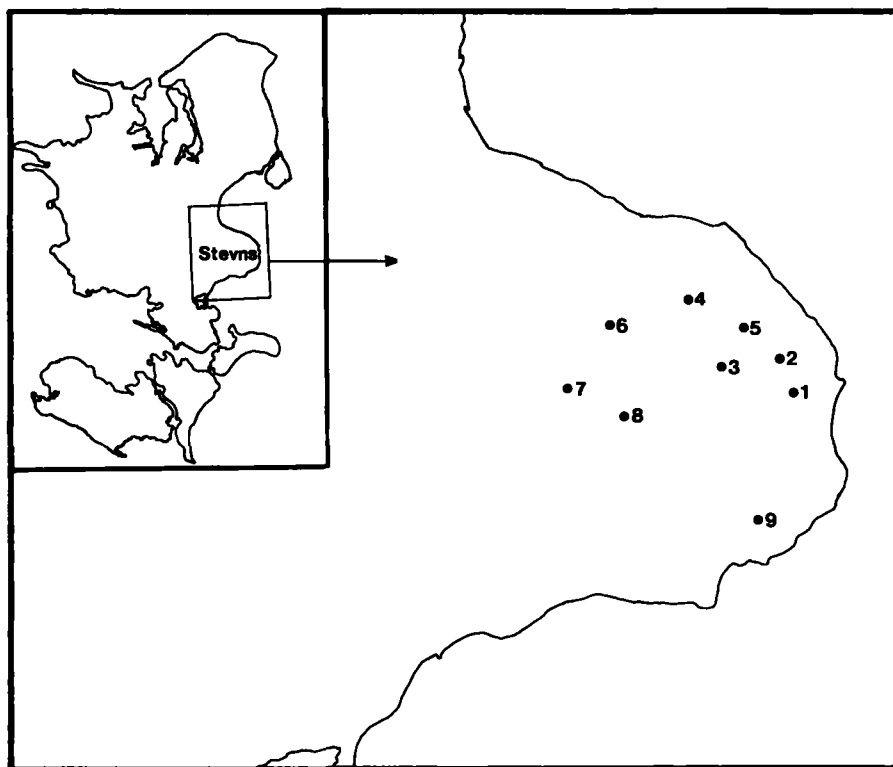


Fig. 1. Map of Stevns showing the location of the villages under investigation.

1. Sigerslev
2. Holtug
3. Råby
4. Magleby

5. Gjorslev
6. Varpelev
7. Hellested
8. Arnøje
9. Lille Heddinge

- A: pottery with "prehistoric characteristics"
 B: Viking Age pottery and Baltic pottery
 C: globular pots, baked at a high temperature (mediaeval ware)
 D: mediaeval jugs and other glazed pottery
 E: Glazed Renaissance pottery
 F: black ware
 G1: mediaeval stoneware
 G2: more recent stoneware
 H: modern pottery
 J: porcelain and faience

Table I shows the distribution according to locality of pottery classified as above.

To give an idea of the amount of sherd material we list below the number of squares for each locality:

Sigerslev	: 8
Holtug	: 8
Raaby	: 5
Magleby	: 9
Gjorslev	: 5
Varpelev	: 12
Hellested	: 13
Arnøje	: 9
Ll. Heddinge	: 12

The great majority of the find material is pottery (cf. the specimens of Baltic ware, fig. 3).

Table I

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G1	G2	H	J	Total
Sigerslev	0	20	0	11	54	5	2	1	157	31	281
Holtug	0	92	26	24	55	1	2	5	207	85	497
Raaby	0	28	1	1	14	0	1	2	89	72	208
Magleby	0	18	0	16	45	27	0	3	146	113	368
Gjorslev	13	2	0	1	13	3	2	11	305	129	479
Varpelev	0	39	1	13	49	9	0	3	76	40	230
Hellested	0	23	0	11	37	2	1	2	177	132	385
Arnøje	0	98	5	9	67	2	2	1	168	92	444
Ll. Heddinge	0	11	12	4	64	2	1	2	169	158	423
Total:	13	331	45	90	398	51	11	30	1494	852	3315

b) Other artefacts

Objects from the middle Ages included:

- 2 spindle whorls of sandstone
- 2 bone combs (for weaving)
- 1 small faceted gambling counter of bone
- 1 iron spur
- 1 amber bead

c) Constructions

1. In several cases the trench encountered extensive soil disturbance from the digging of wells or pits. Among ancient constructions we may mention a well – or possibly a pit – at Arnøje containing c. 100 pieces of Baltic pottery (fig. 3), and a cone-shaped Iron Age well at Gjorslev, in the top layer of which lay the cranium and other bones of a small horse (trench 664 × 1, C¹⁴ date: 720 ± 70 A.D. [cal. 735 ± 70 A.D.]. K-3377). Refuse pits from the Late Middle Ages and subsequent periods were not uncommon.

2. House remains in the form of post holes, occasionally stone-lined and sometimes containing datable pottery, were very common in the small excavation trenches. Of special interest was a 14th century limestone building, sealed by a Renaissance layer, at Holtug.

3. Among the other constructions we may finally mention a furnace, collapsed as a result of heat, with iron slag from the 14th century, and a couple of drying kilns with visible firing layers, in one case with a thick layer of burnt linseed and fragments of a pair of iron scissors. The collapsed furnace was excavated at

Varpelev on the spot where in 1929 the National Museum uncovered a basement foundation which is supposed to belong to one of the aristocratic residences of the Rane family (Stiesdal 1979: 154).

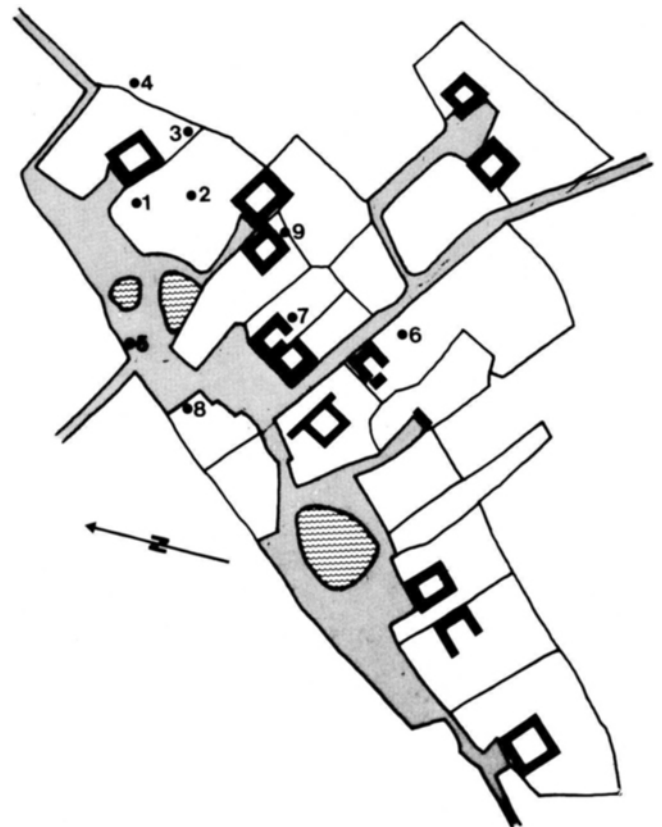


Fig. 2. The village of Arnøje (no. 8 on the map fig. 1). The excavated squares are numbered 1 to 9.

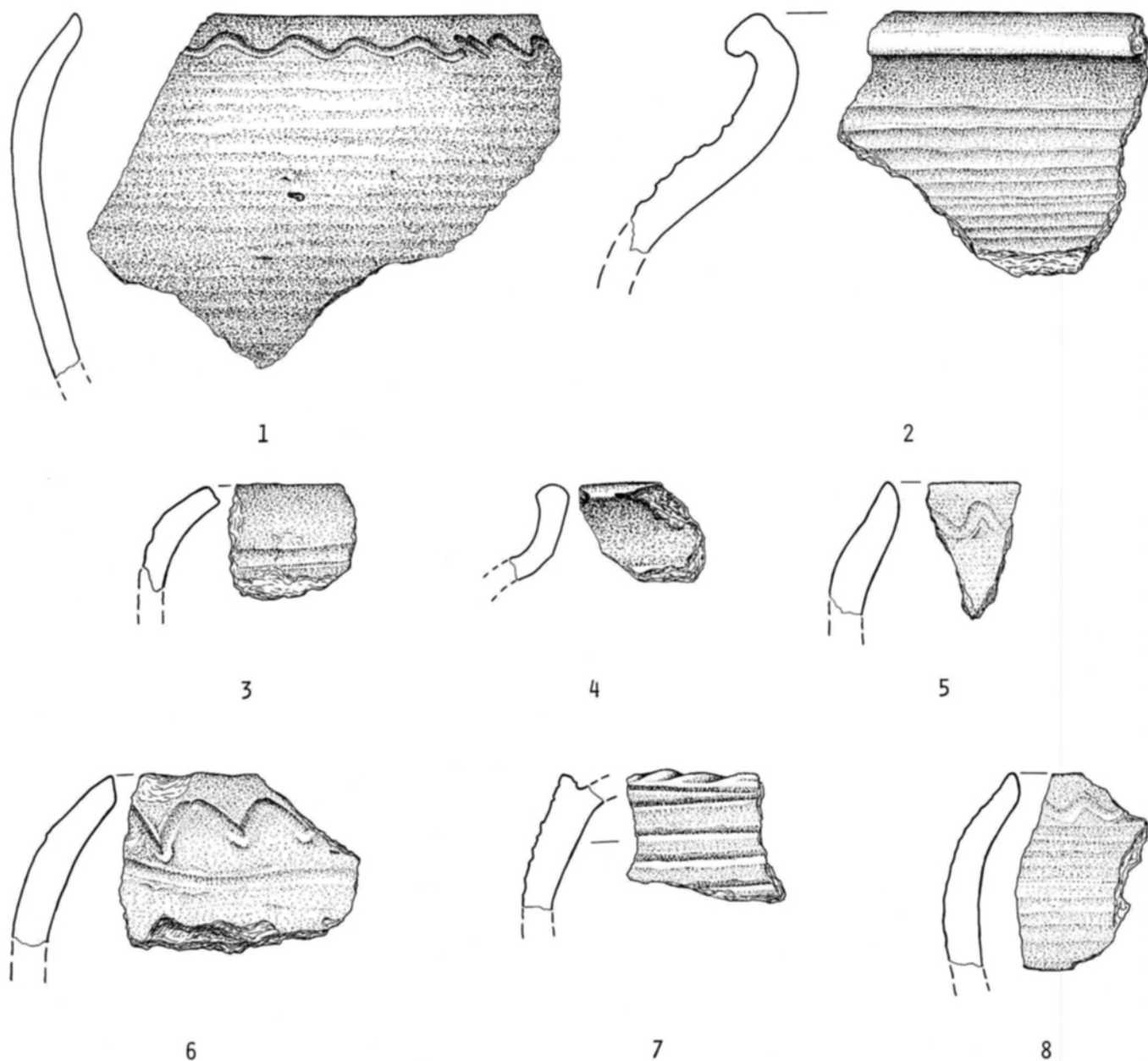


Fig. 3. Radiocarbon dated Baltic pottery from Arnøjegård (no. 3 on the map fig. 2). 2:5.

d) Zoological material

The bone material was very comprehensive, but only in few cases did the find context merit a zoological analysis. Bones for C-14 determination were identified as follows by Tove Hatting of Copenhagen University

Zoological Museum. Gjørsløv, square 664 × 1: part of horse scapula and bones of horse and domestic ox. Magleby, square 663 × 8: bones of horse, sheep and domestic ox. Arnøje, square 667 × 3: bones of horse and domestic ox.

DATING

The archaeological dates depend entirely on the pottery chronology. The Baltic pottery is assigned to the period 1000–1200 A.D.

Bones from a positively identified Baltic layer containing pottery (fig. 3) have been radiocarbon dated as follows: Arnøjegård, trench 667 × 3: 950 ± 70 A.D. [cal. 990 ± 70 A.D.], K-3383, and 970 ± 70 A.D. [cal. 1005 ± 70 A.D.], K-3385.

CONCLUSION

A total of 3.315 pieces of pottery were retrieved from the 80 squares. Approx. 300 of these are from the Viking Age / Early Middle Ages.

All the nine sites investigated yielded Baltic pottery, though in different proportion. In one case it was discovered in all squares (Holtug); in general most squares on each site contained Baltic pottery. At Gjorslev and Arnøje it was found only in a single square.

Five of the sites are villages with a church, but they do not differ from the other sites as far as the sequence and distribution of early pottery is concerned. It also appears to be immaterial whether the church is situated at the center or on the outskirts of the village.

Finally, let us briefly compare the results from Stevns with those obtained from Funen (Grøngaard Jeppesen 1979 II): 1) In Stevns, Baltic pottery was found in 35 of the total of 80 squares, i.e. in approx. 45% of the squares; on Funen in 27 of the 89 squares, i.e. 30%. 2) The total quantity of Baltic pottery from Stevns is 310 sherds (3); from Funen only 100 sherds despite the fact that on average the squares on Funen are three times larger than those in Stevns. Thus the presence of Baltic pottery is much more marked in the area closest to the Baltic Sea.

On the basis of 80 excavated squares distributed at random over 9 villages we may conclude provisionally that the villages of Stevns have retained their location since the 10th / 11th century. This result, which is identical with that from Funen, suggests a regularity that may have a wider national application.

The excavations have not answered the question of the location of Iron Age settlements. It may be as-

sumed, however, that they are not to be found underneath present-day villages: their almost simultaneous foundation during the Middle Ages (as evidenced by the pottery) and continuity of location until the present time represents a regular feature in the history of settlement which is in marked contrast to prehistoric settlements.

Translated by Ole Bay-Petersen

NOTES

¹ The research was carried out with Bjørn Poulsen from the Institute of History, Copenhagen University, as an assistant. Bjørn Poulsen also helped to analyse the material. The artefacts were drawn by Eva Koch, the maps by Bjarne Nielsen. The Danish Research Council for the Humanities assisted financially with the postexcavation analysis.

² Documentation of the work is as follows: all squares were photographed in black and white and colour, and were recorded on the "enclosure" maps. The section and/or surface of individual trenches were drawn whenever stratigraphic conditions affected the find material. The trenches were excavated in horizontal layers.

³ Of the 331 pieces of pottery from the Viking Age / Early Middle Ages, 310 have been identified as Baltic.

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