

# Gudmund Hatt –

## The Individualist Against his Time

by STEFFEN STUMMANN HANSEN

*On occasion of the 100 year anniversary of Gudmund Hatt the editors have asked Steffen Stumann Hansen to present a biographic survey of Gudmund Hatt and his role in the history of Danish archaeology. This is to stress the debt that modern settlement research owes to Gudmund Hatt.*

The History of Danish archaeology usually concentrates on outstanding representatives of the discipline. This is understandable to a certain degree, but unfortunately it has also meant that the history of archaeology is seen as a unilateral and rather harmonious process. Progress has thus been linked with personnel replacements in key positions in the archaeological world.

According to this approach, Danish archaeologists have endeavoured to represent a uniform tradition stretching from C.J. Thomsen (1788–1865), J.J.A. Worsaae (1821–1885) and S. Müller (1846–1934) to J. Brøndsted (1890–1965). However, Brøndsted's opus on Danish prehistory, "Danmarks Oldtid I–III" (1), is certainly not the result of one man's work, and probably the most impressive chapter in the book is the one about the Early Iron Age, and to a large extent based on the work of Gudmund Hatt (1884–1960).

Gudmund Hatt has never occupied a sufficiently prominent position in the annals of Danish archaeology, although everyone seems to accept that his work revolutionized our conception of the Iron Age, and introduced new perspectives to archaeological research. It is striking, then, that there seems to be little room left for Hatt even in the recent debates between respectively the exponents of the so-called "traditional" and "new" archaeology (2).

Characteristically, C.J. Becker in a recent work on the history of Danish archaeology dedicates the final pages to Hatt alone: "His research in this field (field-systems and settlements; present author) was entirely his own work; therefore it would be difficult to fit it into a description of the history of Scandinavian archaeology

at the University (of Copenhagen), and hardly anywhere else, even though he worked in collaboration with the National Museum, although more distantly with the years. If, in this connection, a name should be mentioned it is the Carlsberg Foundation, whose grants supported both his excavations, studies and the following publications." (Becker 1979b, p. 196ff.)

During my investigation into the role of Gudmund Hatt in Danish archaeology (3), I have come to the conclusion that he deserves a much more central position among archaeologists than has so far been allotted him. In his conception of research, I have found elements which have in many ways remained unchallenged. In the following I will try to describe the nature of the dynamics of his work, also in what historical context we may evaluate his contribution today, and in which way it illuminates the strength of dominant paradigms against the concepts of the individual.

Gudmund Hatt was born in 1884 in the small village of Vildbjerg on the moors of Central Jutland. He was intellectually much influenced by his father from a very early age, and many different disciplines interested him, including natural sciences, psychology and philosophy. He started to read medicine but soon gave it up, travelling instead to America. He became deeply interested in ethnography while spending a year among the Cherokees in the territory of Oklahoma. Afterwards, in 1906–1907, he began studying ethnography under Professor R.B. Dixon (1875–1934), and it is probably then he realized that ethnography and archaeology were two closely connected disciplines.

In the years which followed he and his wife, Emilie Demant Hatt (1873–1958), carried out extensive field research among the Lapps in Northern Scandinavia, and these journeys resulted in a good many publications. In 1914 he gained his doctorate on a thesis about the skin garments worn by Arctic peoples; a work which

his professor, H.P. Steensby (1875–1920) later described as follows: “He has, however, not only made the descriptions. He has also penetrated his somewhat multifarious material, and proved capable of presenting it with scientific insight, so that interrelated phenomena and development emerge which were not before realized.” (Steensby 1915, p. 274). Other works in these years dealt with subjects such as reindeer-nomadism.

The underlying belief reflected by these studies is the great significance of ecology in the improvement of society. One may call it an environmental-deterministic perception of history, in the sense that social evolution takes place inside the given ecological framework.

Hatt’s ethnographical studies and field-work continued until around 1919, when he became Keeper of Antiquities at the National Museum in Copenhagen. During the Twenties he and other members of the museum staff were sent round the Danish countryside to inspect and restore prehistoric monuments, and if necessary to carry out excavations.

These journeys of inspection were gradually to bring his ethnographical background to the forefront in his archaeological work. In these years he witnessed the great changes taking place in the Danish cultural landscape – a process of transformation that threatened to destroy thousands of prehistoric monuments because no legislation protected them. The penetration of capitalism and the mechanization of agriculture in Denmark broke up forever the material and spiritual patterns of a peasant culture which had evolved through thousands of years. Still more intensive farming methods, expanding traffic networks, not to mention the large-scale reclamation of moorland, were followed by a comparatively heavy migration from the countryside to the growing urban industrial centres. It was especially the mechanized reclamation of moorland which caused the destruction and elimination of an enormous number of prehistoric monuments.

While other archaeologists at the National Museum seemed unaware of this disastrous situation, Hatt realized that the transformation threatening the landscape demanded special initiatives. The answer lay in a large-scale series of campaigns to safeguard and investigate the most endangered prehistoric elements in the landscape. He could easily see that archaeological institutions, and the whole archaeological environment at that time, were not prepared for a rescue attempt on this scale. He himself had to act.

It was not easy. A systematic campaign to excavate barrows had been carried out in the 1890’s by S. Müller, but there was little understanding of the importance of Early Iron Age settlements and field-systems. In the first place he had to demonstrate their culture-historical significance, and secondly, he had to develop certain principles of excavation, in that existing methods were not fitted for that sort of field-work. Hatt’s excavation of Early Iron Age farms and villages were characterized by quite a new method. In order to establish a survey of the structure of settlements, he stressed the necessity of uncovering sizeable areas at one time. This reform of field-research methodology was revolutionary, not only in Danish archaeology, but probably also in European archaeology (fig. 1).

Upon realizing this Hatt became occupied for the next thirty years with two great campaigns, both of which took place in Jutland.

In 1926, he realized that the traces of low banks on the moors of Jutland were in fact ancient field boundaries, and he felt it a personal obligation to examine these remains. The National Museum could not finance an investigation on this scale, instead he asked the Carlsberg Foundation (4) for money. The Foundation granted him financial support, and the campaign was conducted in the years 1928–1937 (5).

His aim was firstly to establish a survey of the surviving field-systems, and secondly to investigate and excavate as many of these as possible. The work was systematically carried out by himself – but later he hired a student as assistant, as he literally had to race against the tractor (6). The result was the recording of more than a hundred complexes, which Hatt followed up with numerous scientific and popular works (7) (fig. 2).

The “Celtic field” campaign posed Hatt a lot of questions. What did these field-systems express? Was the cultivated land to be regarded as private property? Was there a community in the Early Iron Age village to be compared with the well-known village fellowship of the Middle Ages? He realized, however, that these questions could not be answered exclusively by the field-systems; work on Iron Age settlements which had slowly got under way in the Twenties would have to continue.

This second campaign commenced in 1934, and it was to last until the 1950’s. Once again the Carlsberg Foundation provided the financial basis for the project.



Fig. 1. Excavation at Nørre Fjand, Western Jutland. Hatt's campaign was first and foremost characterized by large-scale surface clearances. During the 1930's and 1940's, several settlements were excavated by this method (photo in the National Museum, Copenhagen).

Hatt had at the time left the National Museum for a professorship in Human Geography at the University of Copenhagen. Characteristically, in his first application to the Carlsberg Foundation, he stressed the interrelations between landscape, field-systems, settlement-structures, ecology and mode of production (8). It was a unique viewpoint in Danish archaeological circles at that time.

A sequence of splendid excavations deserve a more comprehensive mention and among these, to mention but a few are sites such as Nørre Fjand, Østerbølle, Skørbæk Hede, Mariesminde, and Bork Mærsk. This is not the place to give a detailed description of the entire campaign. Suffice it to say that it had the same visionary and theoretical perspectives as the "Celtic field" campaign.

To demonstrate this, I shall quote a short extract from an application from Hatt to the Carlsberg Foundation in 1937 as follows: "If the intention is to complete an excavation, any interruption will be detrimental to it. The National Museum's excavations of settlements have perpetually suffered from being on such a small scale. To continue small excavations year in, and year out, will in the long run be expensive, and give incomplete, confused results. If one wants to pursue settle-

ment studies, the loss of time and money which inevitably accompanies interruption and resumption must be avoided." (9).

These points are still of relevance today in the context of rescue archaeology in Denmark, especially in connection with the so-called "Natural Gas Project".

Hatt followed up his field-work with an impressive amount of scientific and popular writings. These publications were characterized by a still more developed materialistic point of view, although his conclusions were still marked by environmental determinism. They are a striking combination of ethnographical, geographical and archaeological ideas merging in what could be termed "human geography". He described the Early Iron Age in Denmark as a non-communistic society, and one in which arable land was under private ownership. The peasants of that period he saw as "conservative democrats". He considered the freedom loving, hard-working peasantry to be the dynamic force in the progress of history.

I would like here to mention a few of his publications, because they may well be compared with outstanding contemporary research in European archaeology. In 1937 he published the book "Landbrug i Danmarks Oldtid" (Prehistoric Agriculture in Denmark) – popu-



Fig. 2. Three representatives of Danish archaeology in the 1930's: Johs. Brøndsted (1890–1965) to the left, Gudmund Hatt (1884–1960) in the center, and the keeper of *Vesthimmerlands Museum* in Års, S. Vestergaard-Nielsen (1879–1962)—photographed at Borremose in 1937 by C.J. Becker. —Owing to his investigations, Hatt in more than one way became the connecting link between the centralized academic environment around Brøndsted and the rural environment.

lar writing in the best sense of the word, and a splendid example of the interdisciplinary approach. It may be compared with J.G.D. Clark's "Prehistoric Europe: The Economic Basis" (1952).

Hatt followed up his book with a short theoretical article entitled "The Ownership of Cultivated Land" (1939). In this article he tried to explain the progress of history through his own personal combination of archaeological, ethnographical and geographical knowledge. The explanation and discussion was given in terms like "the right of property", "field-structures", "village community" and "collectivism and individualism". To quote the concluding sentences: "It seems to me that an unbiased mind, examining the mass of ethnological evidence, must come to the result that community ownership and personal ownership of land are both ancient, perhaps equally ancient. In a well balanced culture, these two forms of ownership live side by side, supplementing each other in a sort of harmony." (p. 22)

Hatt had another and even less known interest, namely conservation policy. In the late 1920's he was the first person connected with the National Museum to step forward officially and call for conservation legis-

lation which would claim all ancient monuments to be state property. He regarded the popular interest in and commitment to this question to be of fundamental importance, but he was also aware that mechanization – especially of agriculture – made legislation imperative (10). Yet the scope of the Conservation of Nature Act, finally passed in 1937, was probably not far-reaching enough for him, as it did not provide any protection to field-systems and settlements, but mainly to megalithic monuments and barrows. Perhaps as a consequence of this he left the Board of the Nature Conservancy on which he had sat since 1931.

Hatt's opinion on conservation policy was in fact in contradiction to the work already carried out by the archaeologists of the National Museum. The interests of this group were primarily characterized by a strictly archaeological concern for archaeological objects, whereas Hatt saw the cultural landscape as a whole – with the archaeological monuments comprising part of it.

The reader may well ask why the present article is preoccupied by a single individual in the history of Danish archaeology. The main reason is that the thoughts and aims of Hatt signify something of more general in-

terest. He was a man of his age: a fellow player as it were, yet nevertheless an opponent of it. It is especially characteristic of Hatt that he developed in strong opposition to contemporary opinion in the Danish academic world. He was a representative of the natural sciences – a fact which nearly prevented him from finding employment at the National Museum. He also had deep roots in the humanist tradition of the late nineteenth century in Denmark (11), and his educational background was quite different from other prominent archaeologists of that period. It was characteristic that most of them were classical scholars or historians. Hatt broke this pattern, and it is in this light that the individuality of his work has to be regarded.

He established the basis for what might have become a tradition in Danish archaeology, combining as he did, ethnography and human geography with archaeology (12). However, the generation of archaeologists which grew from J. Brøndsted's reorganization of the National Museum in the early 1930's adopted neither Hatt's methods nor his point of view. They were trained according to strictly archaeological concepts, and Hatt probably soon realized this. He knew what had to be done, but was aware that it could not be brought about through the archaeological establishment. In order to achieve his goals he had to follow his own convictions.

The tradition established around Brøndsted was to be continued until today. A tradition which has in many ways been strictly confined to what can be termed "archaeology" in the narrow sense of the word. The tradition which could have been inspired by Gudmund Hatt is today sadly missing in Denmark. A few of his pupils tried to follow up his work, but very little was done in regard to the prehistoric material (6).

On this count, the history of Danish archaeology stands in contrast to Swedish archaeology, where especially the most recent decades have seen some splendid interdisciplinary investigations combining, for example, archaeology and human geography. And some outstanding large-scale analyses of several Swedish landscapes have resulted from them (i.a. Carlsson 1979).

If we look beyond Scandinavia, we may compare (of course with reservations) Gudmund Hatt with Gordon Childe. The evolutionary materialistic point of view held by Childe is very close to that of Hatt. Both consider that specific natural conditions give rise to specific forms of material development, and that technologi-

cal skills led to greater prosperity combined with a growing democracy. Both Childe and Hatt remained strangers to conventional archaeological wisdom (13).

One of the big Danish newspapers wrote in Hatt's obituary in 1960: "A dynamic scientist and personality has passed away; in his last years he was a very lonely man. As a geographer his name will be remembered by coming generations, but to the present generation he remained a stranger without a name." (14).

Today, just as fifty years ago, Gudmund Hatt and his work – in this centenary year of his birth – represent a challenge to the archaeological world: the existential coherence of his past, present and future; the stringent coherence of theory and practice; the visionary antiquarian insight, the strategic perspectives of his research, not to mention his materially humanistic approach to history. Indeed, "new" archaeology has responded no better to this challenge than the bitterly attacked "traditional" archaeology.

Steffen Stummann Hansen, Ahornsgade 8B, DK-2200 Copenhagen.

#### NOTES

1. 1st edition, Copenhagen 1938–1940. 2nd revised edition, Copenhagen 1957–1960.
2. Cf. Kristiansen 1978, Becker 1979a and Jensen 1980.
3. My researches to date in an unpublished M.A. thesis entitled: *Gudmund Hatt. Til belysning af forholdet mellem "arkæologer og fornuftige mennesker"*. An analysis of Hatt's view of man and history, with special attention to his work within the sphere of Danish archaeology. Copenhagen 1981, at the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology, Copenhagen University. Cf. also Stummann Hansen 1980, 1983a and 1983b. The present article is more or less identical with a paper of the same title read at the "Fourth Annual Conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group", held from 13th to 15th December 1982 in Durham, England.
4. The Carlsberg Foundation was established in 1876 by the brewer, J.P. Jacobsen (1811–1887) to support scientific research activities.
5. Cf. Hatt 1949, Stummann Hansen 1980 and 1983b.
6. Especially important was the appointment of Axel Steensberg. In 1938 Axel Steensberg embarked on an extensive investigation of medieval Danish settlement and agriculture for the Third Department of the Nationalmuseum.
7. Cf. bibliography (incomplete) in *KUML* 1959. In the present case we refer to Hatt 1936.
8. The application to the Carlsberg Foundation is dated 29th September 1934. In the archives of the Carlsberg Foundation.
9. Report to the Carlsberg Foundation, dated 8th April 1938. In the archives of the Carlsberg Foundation.
10. For Hatt's work connected with nature conservation cf. Stummann Hansen 1983b.

11. Hatt's philosophical roots were particularly close to the humanistic philosophy of Harald Høffding (1843–1931), which grew up after the collapse of national liberalism in the years following 1864.
12. The close relation between ethnography, archaeology and geography, evident in all Hatt's work should in essentials be considered to lie at the centre of the somewhat diffuse currents which swept through Danish archaeology during the 1970's under the rather self-conscious – and misleading – name of “New Archaeology”.
13. It should be mentioned that Gordon Childe was also inspired by R.B. Dixon (Trigger 1979, p. 126ff). V. Gordon Childe's methodological and theoretical contribution to archaeology has also – characteristically – been taken up for review in the 1970's by British archaeologists in the light of recent trends in archaeology. For example, in biographies by Trigger 1979, McNairn 1980, and Green 1981.
14. *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 28th January 1960.

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