

# *Medieval castles and castle mounds on the islands south of Fyn*

## The situation after 50 years' archaeological investigations

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### INTRODUCTION

Castles of the Middle Ages occur all over Denmark. About a thousand such structures are recorded, although the original number may well have been significantly higher, with some examples having been demolished at such an early date that agricultural activity in later centuries has erased every surface trace of them.

Despite the facts that excavations have been carried out at some sites – usually only in large and historically famous castle ruins – and that the written sources concerning the history of the castles have been studied minutely, there are still large gaps in our knowledge of the construction of castles and fortified homesteads in Denmark in the period 1000-1500. The variety of structures is also wide, from rather small, anonymous mottes with traces of a simple timber building to the Archbishop's massive Hammershus.

Firm information about individual sites is usually sparse. The written sources provide accounts almost exclusively of the royal or episcopal castles, and leave the other sites undocumented in respect of their date of construction, their appearance, their functioning period, their purpose and their ownership. A number of attempts to date these castle mounds by typological means, with reference to well-dated sites of north-western Europe, have all ended in failure as the types in Denmark have proved to span a very long period. As a result, it is

only through a suitably targeted archaeological programme that new information about the date and use of the castles could be won. Such a programme would appropriately concentrate on the ploughed-over moated sites which are threatened with total erasure to begin with, but should also include the areas around the castles where in a number of cases it has been possible to uncover traces of contemporary buildings.

### CASTLE STUDIES ON THE ISLANDS SOUTH OF FYN

One of the most substantial attempts at a systematic examination of all the fortified sites and castle mounds within a defined area began on the islands south of Fyn fifty years ago. The work is still far from complete, but it has nevertheless produced so many fascinating results that it is now time to summarize the most important of them.

There are remains of medieval castles on the three largest islands in the archipelago south of Fyn. Ærø has at least six sites and Tåsinge two, perhaps three, while Langeland, where in the late Middle Ages there were 35 noble seats in addition to Tranekær Castle (Lütken 1909:139), produces no less than fourteen such structures, three of which are still built upon (Fig. 1). Archaeological investigations have

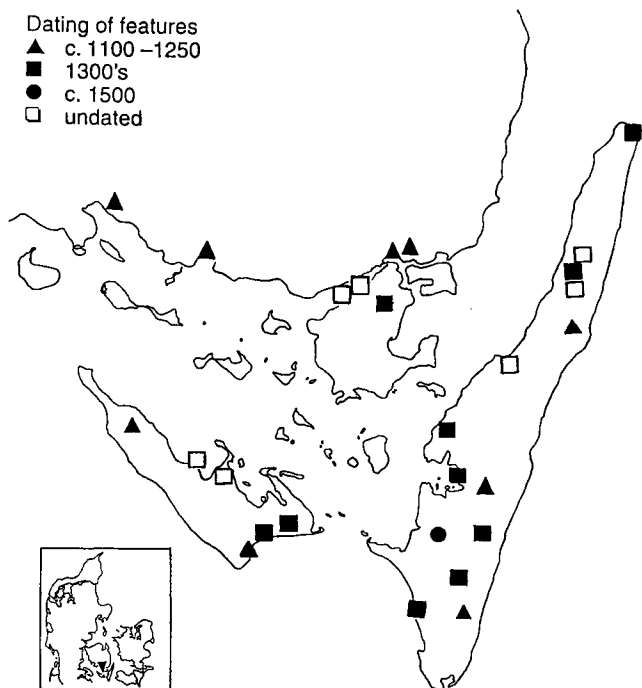


Fig. 1 Medieval castles and castle mounds on the islands south of Fyn.

been undertaken at half of these 23 castles or mottes. There is information about the remains of buildings or finds recovered in a more haphazard manner from five further sites.

#### FORTIFIED MOUND AND CASTLES OF THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

From the early Middle Ages, i.e. the period 1050-1250, five castles are known at present, three from Langeland and two from Ærø. The best known of these is the still extant Tranekær Castle in northern Langeland, with substantial building-remains from the thirteenth century. This castle or fort was mentioned as early as the 1230's as Crown property, and was probably founded together with the castles and fortified boroughs at Fåborg, Vordborg and Svendborg in southern Fyn recorded in 1229 (Jansen 1973:43) for the purpose of guarding the royal interests in this part of Denmark.

Tranekær was built on a natural hill 9 metres high which now has an almost rectangular surface as a

result of quarrying. The defensive facilities of this hill were reinforced by the construction of a moat at its foot. A dam west of the castle mound was also included in the defensive works as it served to produce a lake which provided water for the moat as well as for the castle mill. This dam also served as a barrier for north-south traffic on the island which could thus easily be controlled from the castle.

Of the brick castle from the time of Valdemar, the main building to the north and a massive outer wall with remains of a guardway to the west still stand. In the Middle Ages, however, there were also walls along the south and east sides of the hill, completely enclosing the castle site. The early fortifications also included a six-storey-high, round brick tower with very thick walls which stood in the north-western quarter of the castle court until the 1640's (Fig. 2). Architectural studies of the north wing in the 1970's have also shown that this is one of Denmark's best preserved palaces of the early Middle Ages (Stiesdal 1975).

While the later history of the brick castle and its gradual conversion from a fort and royal administrative centre to a noble castle is fairly well understood, it was only as a result of archaeological work in 1965 that it was revealed that a fortified structure had preceded the brick castle on the hill.

In spite of comprehensive later quarrying of the upper surface of the castle mound, it was possible here to uncover traces of a dry, V-shaped, east-west ditch which apparently divided the hilltop in two. At the same time, postholes and remains of floors with no brick fragments in the northern part of the hill testified to the presence of large timber buildings which, on the basis of the potsherds, may date to the first half of the twelfth century. Tranekær could, therefore, very well have been founded as early as the reign of – perhaps by? – King Niels (1104-1134).

The investigation of another, presumably royal, castle, Søby Volde on Ærø, in 1983, corroborated the dating of the first phase at Tranekær. This impressive and very well-preserved moated site is situated on the southernmost part of a long range of hills which stretches northwards out towards the dried up Vitsø cove. This cove was apparently still navigable at the beginning of the eighteenth century and, as the museum's excavations in the innermost part of the cove show, functioned as an un-

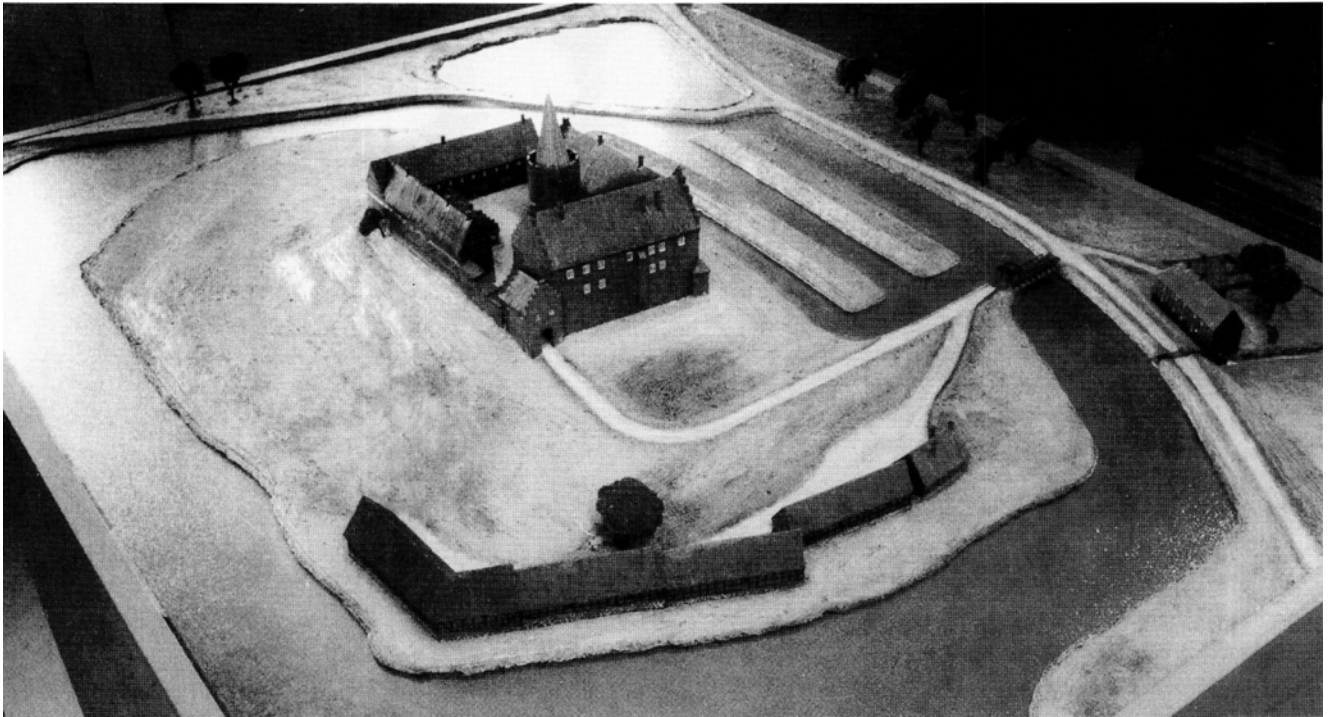


Fig. 2 The appearance of Tranekær around the year 1500. View from the north-east. After a model constructed by conservator B. Felsted in collaboration with the author.



Fig. 3 Søby Volde from the air, with the dried-up Vitsø cove upper right. Photo: H. Stiesdal 1959.

loading site and harbour for sea-traffic over the western Baltic as far back as the Iron Age (Skaarup 1979; 1981).

Søby Volde consists of three main units (la Cour 1972:205). Furthest south is an almost trapezoid castle mound with sheer sides which rises about 10 metres above the surrounding terrain. The top of this mound is enclosed by a strong ring bank, the fill of which appears to have been held in place on both sides by a substantial plank revetment. A row of deep postholes placed at intervals of a couple of metres along the inner side of the bank may have supported an internal walkway which would have enabled the defenders to move their forces around more easily under the cover of the rampart when under attack.

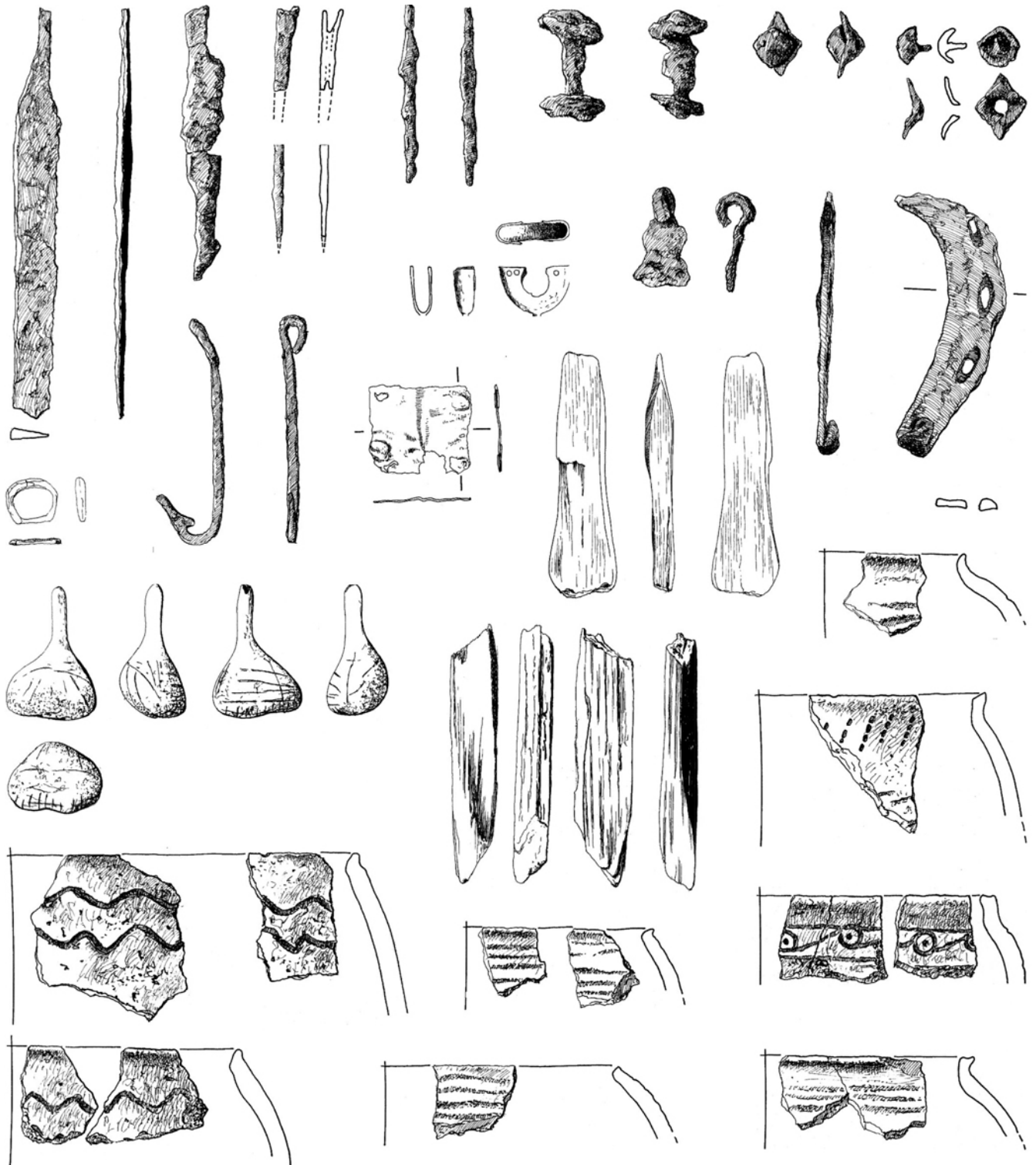


Fig. 4 Soby Volde. Knives, arrowheads, rivets, horseshoe, fish-hook, mount, buckle, chape, whetstone, decorated flint nodule and pottery. 2:5.

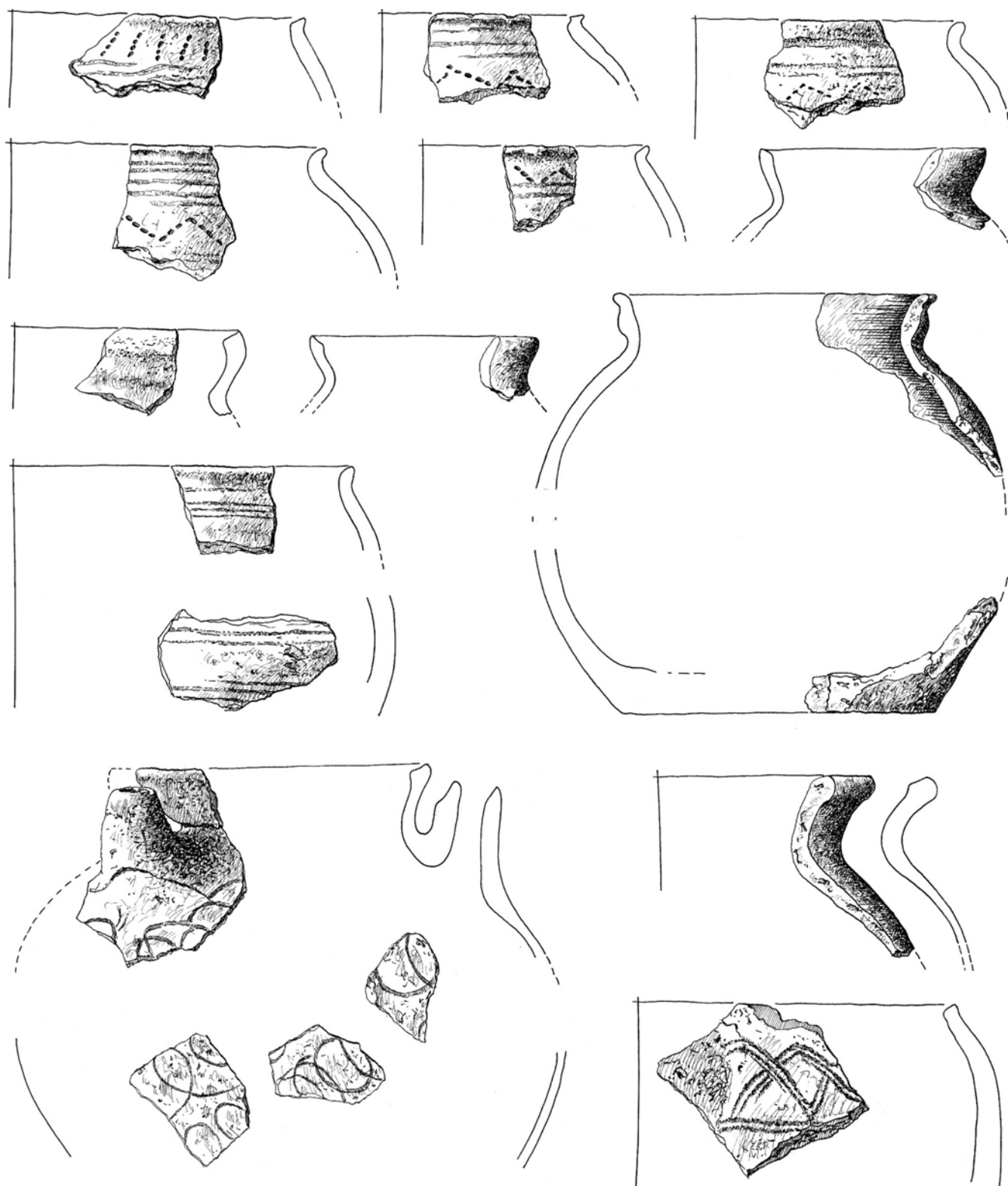


Fig. 5 Søby Volde. Pottery. 2:5.

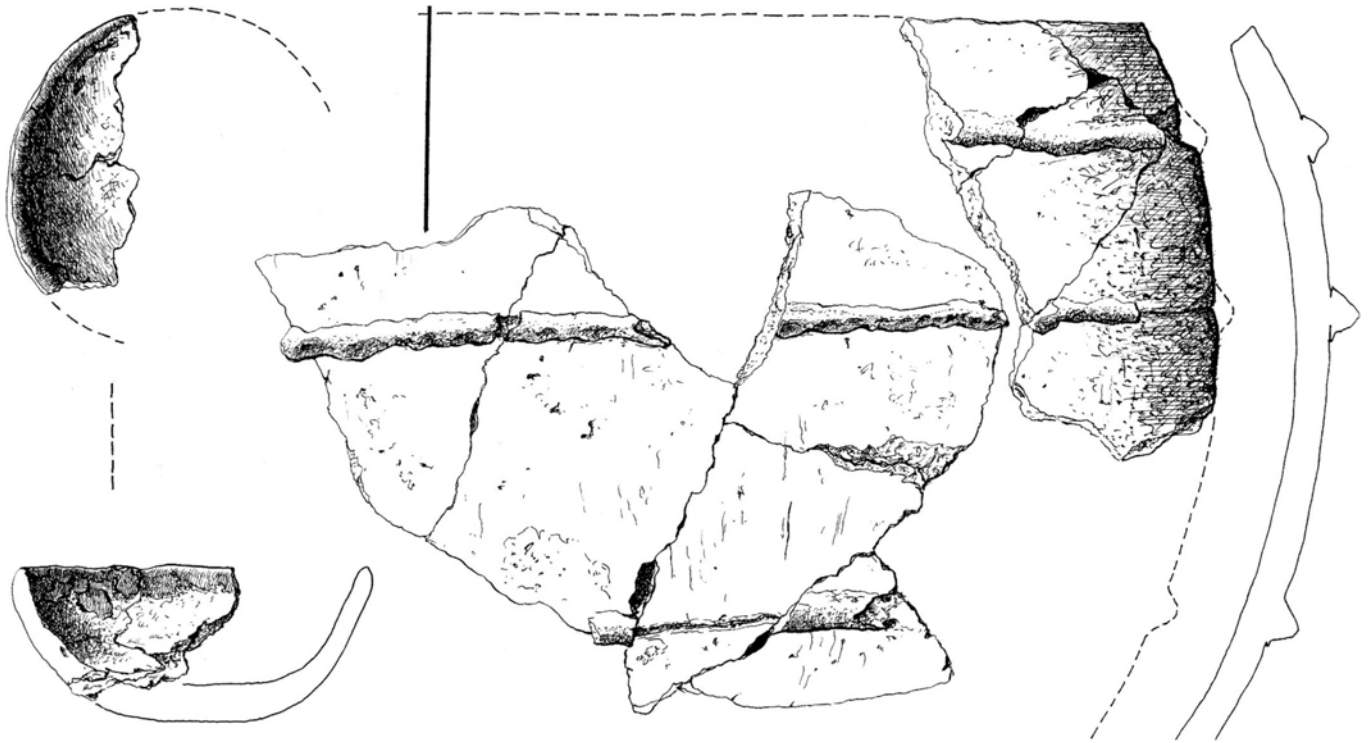


Fig. 6 Søby Volde. Large strip-decorated pot and small cup. 2:5.

Access to the castle was from the north by way of drawbridges which lay across a deep, double moat with an intermediary bank. Before an attacker reached this point it would have been necessary to force an outer castle which was defened by a north-facing, semicircular rampart. A section along the foot of the main castle has also shown that the moat continued around the foot of the mound as a dry ditch, 2 metres deep and 6 metres wide at the top. A couple of metres outside of this traces of yet another defensive structure were discovered in the form of a palisade.

The very small trial trenches into the surface of the main castle produced a significant quantity of finds including sherds from at least 75 vessels together with weaponry and various tools of bone, stone and metal (Figs. 4-6). Besides these there were some building traces, all of them timber, amongst which the foundations of just one building were fully uncovered. This was the plot of a small log building of almost rectangular outline (Fig. 7). This building lay close beside the rampart to the south and

had its entrance facing the middle of the castle. A collapsed furnace and various pieces of smithing slag outside the building, together with the large quantities of animal and fish bone in the floor layer, show that the building served the castle's domestic economy. Up against the rampart to the north there were scattered traces of another building, apparently the remains of the gatehouse of the castle. A feature more than 2 metres deep on the inside of the rampart to the west seems, meanwhile, to have served as the castle cess-pit initially, before it was filled up and a building could be placed on the site.

Particularly puzzling is the discovery of a row of large postholes which seem to cut diagonally across the eastern part of the castle plateau. These can hardly be part of a hall structure, however reasonably such a structure could be postulated in this place. The observations rather suggest that the row of posts was placed there in order to divide the inner surface of the castle up.

Both the pottery, which consists almost exclusively of the Slavic-influenced Baltic Ware (Liebgott



Fig. 7 Søby Volde. View from the surrounding bank to the south with the western part of the small log building in the foreground and remains of the long crossing row of posts in the background. Photo: J. Skaarup 1983.

1977:132; 1989:296), and the other finds imply a very short functioning period for this large castle. Of importance in this respect are three silver coins struck under King Niels, Valdemar Sejr and Erik Plovpenning respectively, i.e. within the period of 1104-1250. The coin of Niels was found deep in the floor layer beneath the small log building. It has no signs of wear and thus cannot have been in circulation long. There is thus good reason to infer that King Niels was the founder of the castle. The few sherds from just three or four glazed jugs apparently show that Søby Volde was redundant as early as the second half of the thirteenth century and had ceased to exist as a castle.

The construction of large castles such as Tranekær and Søby Volde in the twelfth century ought proba-

bly to be seen primarily as an expression of the king's desire to defend his kingdom against foreign attack. German expansion in the Baltic area and repeated Wendish assaults on the population of the Danish islands at this time necessitated the raising of a series of fixed strongpoints along the coasts. What is new is that it appears possible to assign the castles to a date as early as the reign of Niels. This particular king's long reign created ideal circumstances for strengthening the defence of the realm.

The royal power did not, however, stand alone in attempting to stem the Wendish raids, which appear only to have been brought to an end with the Danish naval victory over Bugislav of Pomerania in 1184. The hard-pressed rural population on the islands appear, in these circumstances, to have themselves attempted to defend their lives and property by constructing refuges in which they could shelter at times of war. These could be of substantial dimensions, such as Gammelborg on Bornholm and Virket on Falster, which are mentioned by Saxo in connexion with a major Wendish attack in 1158. Very much smaller structures are also known, however, which must have been linked to neighbouring major farms or have been constructed as a common shelter for the occupants of a single village (Engberg 1992; Andersen 1992). Borrebjerg in the now dried-out Magleby cove in southern Langeland is apparently a good example of one of these minor, local defensive works of the early twelfth century. So too is Guldborg in central Langeland, a 38 metre-high hill with sheer sides and a surface of a good 3,000 sq m, where cultivation has produced, amongst other things, a silver chain with coins of the late eleventh century (Skovmand 1942:152). A now destroyed structure at Gundesgård, northern Langeland, probably also belonged to this group, to which in 1996 a hitherto unknown fortified site at Vejsnæs on Ærø could be added.

The Borrebjerg structure, which was excavated in 1946-47, consists of a semicircular rampart about 120 metres long, raised along the eastern foot of a natural hill, 10 metres high, which at the time of construction was an island in the innermost part of Magleby cove. The area of some 1,100 sq m inside the bank contained no structural remains and only negligible waste layers, which must indicate that the castle was never permanently occupied (Skaarup 1982).



Fig. 8 Alfvini's pendant from Borrebjerg. Photo: National Museum. 2:1.

A section through the barely 3 metres high, now severely plough-eroded bank, revealed that it was constructed in two phases. The building material was grass turf which was stabilized by a row of strong, deeply driven oak stakes in the core of the rampart. In the first phase there may have been a gateway towards the south-west. No moat was considered necessary. The waters of Magleby cove appeared to the defenders of the castle to offer a reasonable substitute for any such thing.

As a refuge Borrebjerg was a failure. The site fell twice in the first half of the twelfth century, with the defenders either being cut down or taken prisoner. The bodies of the defenders during the first assault were left on the site, and remained there until after a certain interval sufficient means were available to rebuild the castle. At this time the semicircular rampart was substantially reinforced. On the inside there seems to have been a certain amount of clearing up, as the now completely disarticulated remains of the defenders of the refuge, together with various fragments of their possessions, were gathered together and redeposited beneath the fill of the now higher

rampart. Altogether, the remains of one small child, three women, three men and four unsexable individuals, one of whom was very old, were found here. Several more bodies may of course remain in the unexcavated parts of the rampart. But not even the higher rampart was strong enough to keep the enemy out. Another attack sometime around 1140 put an end to the existence of this little fortification. This time too the slaughtered defenders were left on the site, where their skeletal remains were found scattered behind the rampart. Old traditions record the ploughing up here of 'many skeletons lying side-by-side' and a 'terribly long iron sword'.

The finds from this small refuge comprise Baltic-ware pottery, weapons, riding equipment, various mounts and locks, and a range of personal items and tools such as knives, scissors and jewellery. Of especial interest in respect of dating is a small gilt silver pendant with the inscription +ALFVINI MEFECIT – 'Alfwine made me' (Fig. 8). Alfvini or Alvvin is the same as Erik Emune's English moneyer who was active in Lund in the 1130's. This piece is unworn and, according to its find circumstances, must have been lost during the final conquest of the castle.

Excavations at the Guldborg motte in 1993-95 revealed a situation which is reminiscent of that at Borrebjerg in several ways. Scattered along the uppermost part of the sides of the mound and around the edge of the its top were various weapons, including javelin-, lance- and arrowheads, which bear witness to a violent battle at the site (Skaarup 1995; 1998). In this case too, the castle eventually fell. Skeletal material containing the remains of the dead defenders, men, women and children, and their possessions, was found in a large heap besides the remains of the castle entrance close to the southern edge of the plateau and scattered inside the burnt palisade to the south and east. The distribution of the bones indicates that the very casual clearing up of the site did not take place before the bodies had been completely defleshed.

Two complete bodies, those of a man and of a 12-year-old child, buried in a line in front of the gate section, seem to have been sacrificed by the victors, who hung a flayed horse's head with its skull and lower jaw still *in situ* above the bodies. This votive ritual, together with finds of Slavic types of arrowhead and sheath-mounts, indicates that the conquerors were Wends from the areas south of the Baltic.



With the aid of several finds of jewellery, the weaponry, and a few silver coins, the latest of which was struck under Erik Emune (1134-1137), it is possible to date the dramatic fall of Guldborg to the around the middle of the twelfth century: the same date as the final conquest of Borrebjerg.

In 1996 Langelands Museum learnt of another fortified site that had been used in the early Middle Ages. During the excavation of the site of a fourteenth-century church dedicated to St. Albert at Vejsnæs, it transpired that the church was built inside an almost completely obscured earlier fortification consisting of a V-shaped ditch about 6 metres wide and 3 metres deep with an internal bank of about the same dimensions (Skaarup 1997:54f.). This fortification was based upon the steep coastal bank to the east and enclosed a nearly trapezoid area of about 2,500 m<sup>2</sup>. On the basis of radiocarbon datings of animal bone found at the base of the ditch the construction of the fortification can be dated to the eighth century. There is, however, clear evidence that it was kept maintained both in the Viking Period and in the early Middle Ages. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the structure appears to have been equipped with a tower-like brick building with a ground area of 10 m x 10. Several cross-bow bolts from this date have been found, the chape of dagger sheath, pottery and more. This old fortification was superseded only by the construction of St. Albert's church alongside the brick building around 1300, when the castle site was converted into a churchyard.

#### CASTLE MOUNDS OF THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

While the castle-building of the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth seems to have been very limited in extent, and predominantly the result of initiatives taken by the royal government and the uppermost ranks of society, the turbulence following the end of the Valdemar period and the increasing dissolution of the kingdom led to a veritable avalanche of castle-building in Denmark. This development, which apparently meant that every landowner with sufficient means fortified his home, naturally left its mark on the islands south of Fyn too, where various new castles were built in the pe-

riod. Of the 'old' castles on the islands, only Tranekær remained in use at the end of the thirteenth century. The new fortified sites show a wide range of variation in respect of form and size, which must reflect, *inter alia*, the economic resources of the builders. A general feature, however, is that the castles or – as in many cases they ought rather to be called – fortified homesteads, were constructed as water fortresses: in other words exploiting small islands, headlands or islets in lakes, coastal areas and marshlands. These natural defensive facilities were sometimes supplemented by the construction of moats or palisaded banks, but generally the structures seem better designed to provide shelter against wandering armed bands than to resist a regular military siege.

#### *The structures on Langeland*

At least two of Langeland's still extant manor sites can be traced back to the fourteenth century. These are Fårevejle by the innermost part of Henninge cove and Skovsgård by the Langeland channel. Fårevejle is first mentioned in written sources around 1350 and it appears even then to have been a significant place. This is also implied by the presence of a now demolished, foundation-trenched late-medieval main building of several storeys, and traces of old ditches and ramparts.

In the case of Skovsgård, the earliest documentary reference is from 1457. The main building of this farmstead lies within a ditched, four-sided, fortified site, where a four-winged timber-frame seventeenth-century building stood until 1887. When this was demolished the remains of a large medieval brick building were discovered. A round, now severely plough-eroded bank surrounded by a ditch in the field slightly south-west of the present main building indicates where the first Skovsgård is to be sought.

This inference was confirmed by a small excavation in 1993, when, with the aid of sherds found, it was possible to date the structure to around 1300. Ploughing had removed nearly all of the structural evidence from the surface of this natural hill about 6 metres high and measuring about 100 m x 110, but at its foot traces of a ditch-system could be identified, doubled in the east, and exploiting a narrow

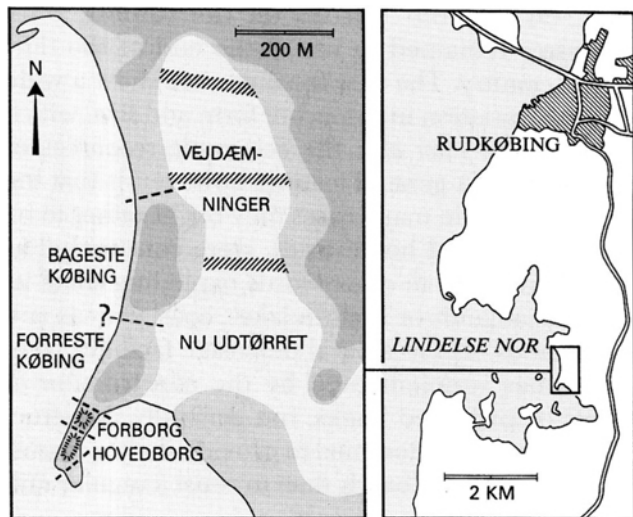


Fig. 9 The castle at Købingshoved and the two Købings. The stippled lines mark the crossing ditches. (After SKALK 1986:3).

swampy band of water and bog around the hill. Inside the ditch there appears to have been a now collapsed rampart along the foot of the hill, material for which was obtained by quarrying the hill.

In addition to Skovsgård, the construction of five more castle mounds on Langeland has been dated to the end of the thirteenth or first half of the fourteenth century as a result of archaeological work. The most interesting of these is the legendary site of Købingshoved which is situated on a long, narrow headland stretching northwards into Lindelse cove. According to a persistent old tradition, there is supposed to have been a castle or pirate stronghold at this site, together with an urban community in the nearby field of Købing that was older than the island's market town of Rudkøbing. When the inhabitants wished to build a church here they were unable to complete it, and as at the same time the water in the cove became so shallow that ships could not sail in to the town, the settlement could not thrive. The decision was taken to pull down the unfinished church and to move both it and the whole town to the place where Rudkøbing church and town now stand. Thus the legend. The excavations of 1947-48 told a different story, at least in respect of dating. The moated site itself had been fairly extensively



Fig. 10 Købingshoved. Part of pilgrim badge for the Dutch saint Servatius, venerated in the town of Maastricht. End of the 13th century.

dug away, and the top surface, where wall remains had been found on several occasions in previous centuries, was, in consequence, not included in these excavations.

The moated site occupied the highest part of the originally about 800 metre-long and up to 150 metre-wide headland (Fig. 9). Cutting across this point three ditches about 5 metres wide at the base were dug. The northern ditch cuts the moated site off from the mainland to the north. South of this there is a small, almost square bailey which is about 4 metres higher than the ditch. South of this bailey is the middle ditch, and south of that the main castle, the surface of which lies about 7 metres above Lindelse cove. The main castle measures about 70 m x 30 and is divided from the lower part of the headland in the extreme south by yet another transverse ditch. Along the foot of both the bailey and the main castle there is a row of deeply driven heavy oak stakes which were presumably placed there to reduce the natural erosion of the castle mounds at high water.

Access to the castle was across two bridges from the north. The heavy supporting posts of the south-



Fig. 11 Kalveborg from the air viewed from the south. Photo: H. Stiesdal 1966.

ern bridge were found *in situ* and are preserved in the fill layers of the rampart. The layers in both ditches were rich in finds: food remains, sherds from broken pots, various wood and bone artefacts including one complete yew-wood bow, various shoes and leather fragments, and a number of coins. Amongst the more unusual finds are a small silver stylus and a Dutch lead pilgrim's badge (Fig. 10). On the strength of the finds the functioning period of the castle can be identified as the first decades of the fourteenth century.

North of the bailey the headland becomes somewhat wider, and forms two low hills, called the Town Site, or Back and Front Købing. These are separated from the northernmost part of the headland, Svinglen, by means of a now partially refilled transverse ditch. Traces of another ditch may be discernable between Back and Front Købing. The remains of three old road dykes lead from the Klæsø peninsula across the inner, low section of the dammed-up

cove east of Købingshoved out to Svinglen and the castle.

In earlier times, large quantities of stone and waste have been dug out and carted away from the Town Site, and there are many reports of the finding of sherds, medieval brick and iron slag associated with quadrangular and rectangular stone pavements. In the excavation of 1948 the destruction of the old settlement area proved to have been so extensive that only a few coherent structural remains could be recorded in the form of rubbish pits, a well, post-holes, and individual damaged pavements which must represent floors and paved slipways. The finds of pottery and common utensils have since been added to by a large quantity of metal-detector finds, including a number of coins, whose dating from the end of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fourteenth locates the settlement within the same date-range as the castle.



Fig. 12 Kalveborg. The refilled ditch with pieces of timber in the foreground. In the background the drawing of a section through the northern part of the semicircular rampart. Photo: J. Bech 1983.

The background to the construction of the castle and the small defended settlement on the headland north of it is perhaps to be sought in the political circumstances that arose in 1326 when the influential seneschal Laurids Jonsøn Panter, through the alliance between Duke Valdemar and Count Gert against Christoffer, was granted Tranekær (and Langeland) together with Ærø as his fief. It must have been of particular importance for Laurids Jonsøn to maintain a secure connexion between his two possessions. On Langeland, the natural harbour in Lindelse cove provided the best embarkation point for navigation to Ærø. It is therefore reasonable to postulate that Laurids Jonsøn was responsible for the fortification of the Købing area, and that part of the island's trade, as long as the site was active, was drawn to this site.

Kalveborg, by the south coast of Langeland, is a small, very much ruined castle mound, the dating of which was first established by a study carried out in 1983. The mound stands right above the Baltic and consists of a natural oblong hill about 6 metres high which has been transformed into a small motte-like fortification by quarrying. The hill was a virtual

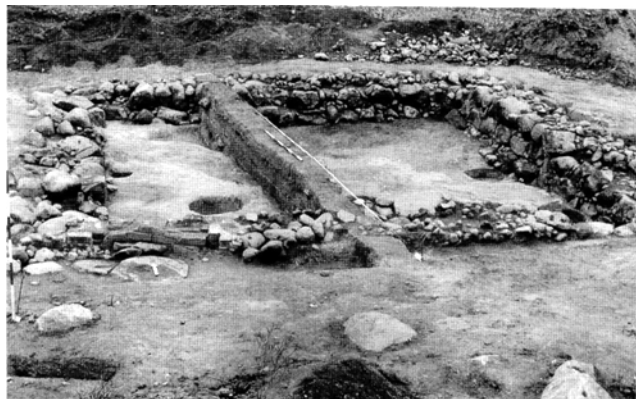


Fig. 13 Lykkesholm. The surviving foundations of the largest of the brick buildings on the castle mound. Left, the bottom layers of the walled entrance staircase in the southern wall. Photo: J. Skaarup 1988.

island at the edge of a shallow lagoon (Fig. 11). Its north-eastern part was separated from the rest by a wide, trough-shaped cross-ditch and was used for the construction of a rampart about 10 metres wide and still 1.5 metres high which forms a small, irregular circle east of the castle mound and about 12-15 metres from its foot. The bank was built of grass turf and morainic soil (Fig. 12). The area between the rampart and the castle mound served as a broad, flat-bottomed moat only 80 cm deep.

There are no finds from the castle mound, the small, now nearly completely eroded surface of which could scarcely have afforded space for anything more than a simple timber defensive tower. It was probably remains of this, or of a wooden bridge across the ditch, which were found during trial excavations in the moat in 1983. Since the other finds, a few animal bones and a couple of undiagnostic body sherds, provided no basis for close dating, the museum had to refer the question to Skalk's dendrochronological laboratory. Here it was possible to establish that the wood for the construction was felled after – but not long after – 1326. The small castle structure, which seems only to have been meant to serve as a temporary refuge in times of trouble, can thus, as many other castles all over Denmark, be associated with the state of civil war that followed the death of Christoffer II in 1332 and the efforts of his successor, Valdemar Atterdag, to unite the divided kingdom by armed force.

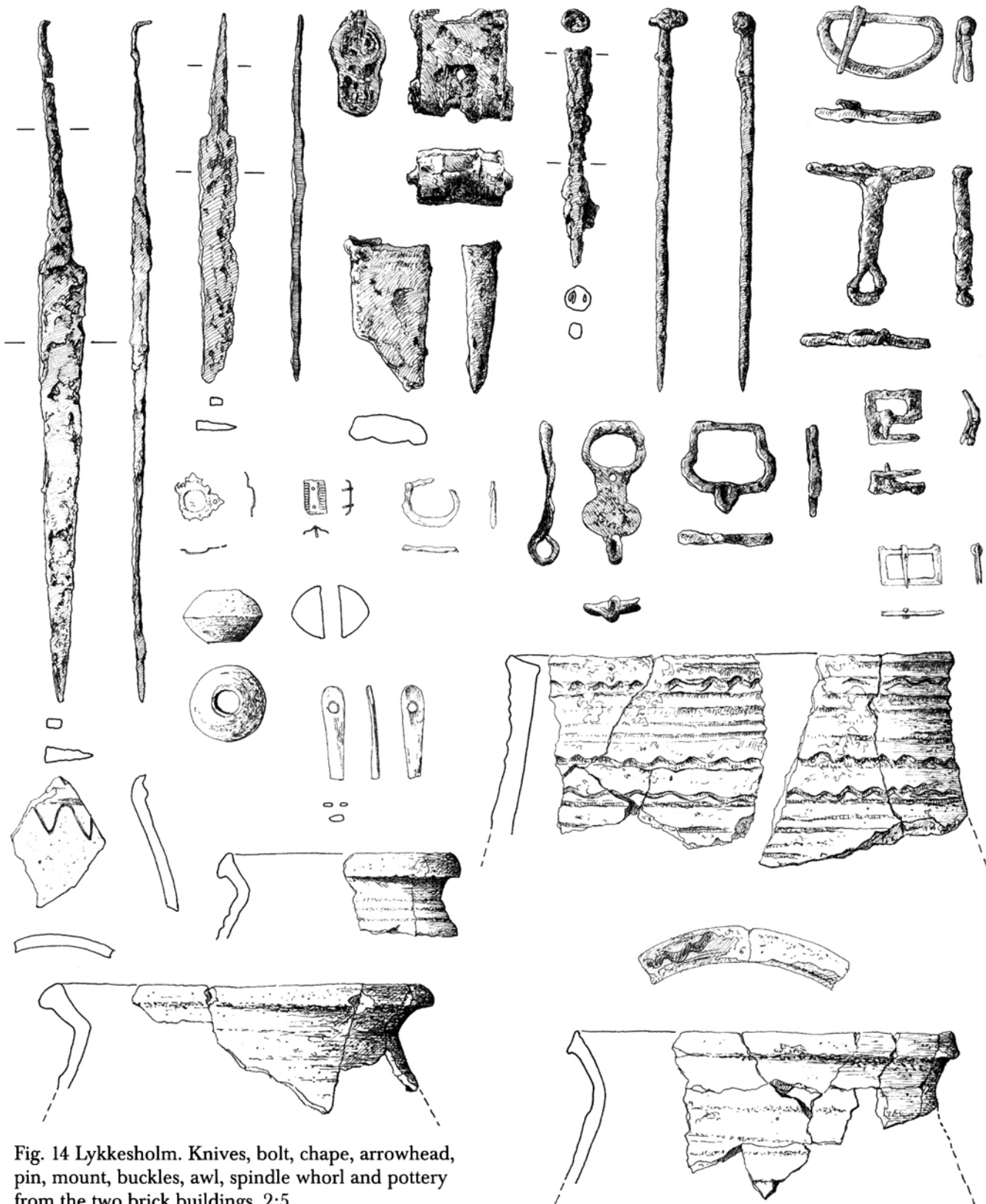


Fig. 14 Lykkesholm. Knives, bolt, chape, arrowhead, pin, mount, buckles, awl, spindle whorl and pottery from the two brick buildings. 2:5.



Fig. 15 Lykkesholm. Unglazed oxidized jug from the burnt brick building. Photo: S. Botfeldt. 1:2.

In 1987, the mound of the medieval manor of Lykkesholm was identified in southern Langeland, a site first mentioned in surviving sources in 1459 (Trap 1957:971). The site was formed of a natural, now cultivated, hill of a rounded and slightly ovoid outline. A small spit of land links the south-east of the hill with the surrounding land. Ploughed-up remains of a stone-paved roadway on the spit and to its south evidently represent the original access to the homestead, which must here have been guarded by a palisade.

On the northern part of the mound the remains of three buildings were uncovered, together with various pits and wells. Two of the buildings are thirteenth- or fourteenth-century while the third, and the most poorly preserved, is from the Late Middle Ages. At the top of the hill lay the well-preserved rock-built cellar of a brick building measuring about 8 m x 8 with a square ground plan. The remains of a walled entrance staircase were preserved in the southern wall (Fig. 13). On the basis of coin finds, the construction of this building could be dated to the second half of the thirteenth century. In the mid-



Fig. 16 The brick building at Heigned during excavation. Photo: T. Bech 1990.

dle of the fifteenth century a fierce fire had brought this phase of use to an end. The brick building appears to have served as the owner's residence throughout its functioning life, while he also, naturally, had at his disposal other buildings of less durable material. Rich finds in the house site, of pottery, food remains, various metal tools, jewellery, and some weapons and coins, clearly illustrate this point (Figs. 14-15).

About 18 metres east of the burnt building, the foundation of another thirteenth-century brick building measuring 6 m x 6 was discovered. This site contained large quantities of pottery, faunal remains, and a number of metal, bone and antler artefacts. These finds, which also include several coins, date the functioning period of the building to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These two buildings seem to have been totally superseded by a Late-medieval timber-framed building which may have remained standing right up until the abandonment of Lykkesholm as a major court by Kaas family in 1689.

In 1990, only 800 m east of the hall of Egeløkke in northern Langeland, Langeland Museum excavated a large part of the newly discovered castle mound left by the manor of Heigned, abandoned after a fire around 1715 (Trap 1957:948). The ploughed, slightly ovoid castle mound was surround-

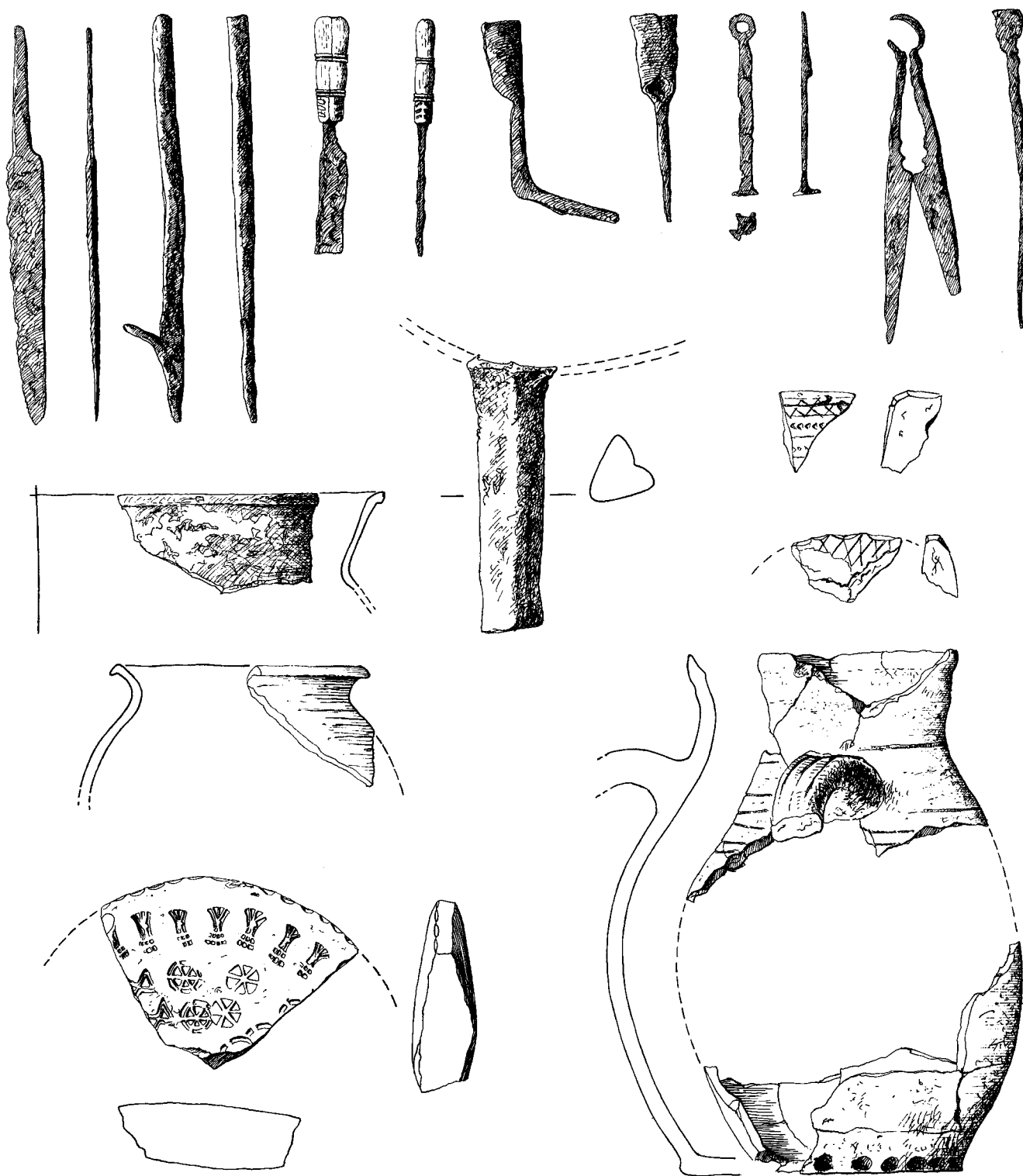


Fig. 17 Heigned. Knives, harpoon point, lamp stand, key, scissors, fragments of metal cauldron, decorated ceramic lids and pottery. The lids and cauldron fragments are unstratified finds from the castle mound; the other objects were found in the brick building. 2:5.



Fig. 18 14th-century seal found outside the entrance to the small brick building at Heigned. 2:1.

ed by natural ditch-like hollows which were supplemented to the west by a low boundary ditch. The fortified site proved to contain the remains of various buildings, most of them, however, late and severely plough-damaged. Best preserved was the cellar of a High-medieval brick building on the eastern side of the hill. This small, almost tower-like building had a square ground plan measuring 6 m x 6 externally. The lime-covered boulder wall of the cellar was intact to a height of 1.5 m. In the northern wall a walled entrance-way was found with the frame to an internal door and a medieval brick floor in the entrance opening that was only 1 m deep and 1.1 m wide (Fig. 16). North of this an access pit with a simple stone stairway and traces of a timber-framed side building was uncovered. The date of construction of the brick building can be dated to the first half of the fourteenth century on the basis of various coins and domestic implements (Fig. 17). The building appears to have been pulled down at the end of the Middle Ages. Amongst the more unusual finds from the building is a well-preserved seal of the fourteenth century (Fig. 18). The seal bears a previously unknown coat of arms in the form of a stylized oak tree and the inscription \* S'OLAF (?) EAM(?) ALVINCNC. Herr Olaf may very well have been the builder of the house.

Although unambiguous evidence in the form of datable finds from excavation is still lacking, there is no doubt that the majority of the other, so far un-discussed castle mounds of Langeland will, through future investigation, prove to have been constructed in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Hovgård at Bøstrup and the now almost completely levelled Hoborg near the northern point of the island both belong to this group.

Hoborg, like Kalveborg and Købingshoved, is situated on a coastal hill. The very prominent castle mound was still about 6 metres high in the middle of the last century and had four-sided outline and steep sides. It was enclosed by a double ditch on the land side. Rows of heavy driven stakes guarded the sea side against erosion. Fragments of brick and broken walling have been found on the hill. According to local tradition the site is supposed to have been very much haunted at night time, with the sound of wagons and flaming torches! A small excavation in May 1998 confirmed the construction of the site with a double ditch and gave finds from the fourteenth century.

Hovgård, further south, which is recorded under the name of Fæbækgård as early as 1416, was also surrounded by a moat. On the much quarried main mound of Hovgård there was reportedly a stone or medieval brick building with foundation trenches. Hovgård was also owned, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, by Christian II's famous governor Søren Stampe (Trap 1957:948).

#### *Castle mounds on Ærø*

On Ærø, in addition to the earlier medieval Søby Volde and the newly discovered fortified site at St. Albert's churchyard, Vejsnæs, there are four known High-medieval castle mounds, one of which, Borrevold or Styteborg at Borgnæs, collapsed into the sea leaving no trace behind. None of the sites on Ærø is referred to in contemporary documents.

The site of Absalon's Fort on the eastern side of the wide Gråsten cove was investigated by Langelands Museum in 1995. The now totally levelled castle structure was described in 1781 as 'a four-sided fort with a double ditch and bank within which there anciently stood a four-cornered tower which is believed to have been constructed on the direction of Bishop Absalon in order to keep watch for pirates'. The investigation demonstrated that the central part of the structure consisted of a small, almost rectangular, castle mound, measuring about 18 m x 35, upon which were found traces of a very solidly built, tiled central tower of timber. The tower had a ground area of 6.5 m x 7. South of the tower a plank-built well and a set of heavy, deep-planted oakwood posts which probably represent a



(draw)-bridge were discovered. The southern foot of the hill was marked and reinforced by a row of slender driven beechwood stakes. The castle mound proved to have been surrounded by a double ditch, triple in the west, with banks in between the ditches, now completely levelled. The inner ditch was 10 metres wide and round-bottomed, the outer ditch 5-8 metres wide. The large and diverse assemblage of finds, including about 125 coins, appears to assign the structure to a brief but intensive period of use in the first half of the fourteenth century.

By the western shore of Gråsten cove and directly above the Baltic lies the castle mound of Gråsten Fort, consisting of two, small, four-sided mounds connected by a dyke (Olsen & Bang 1992:143). This structure has a low position, surrounded by a marshy coastal meadow in which, as at Absalon's Fort, the remains of double and triple ditch-systems with intermediary banks can be seen. Apart from a section trench through the dyke no investigations of this castle have been made, and there are no known finds by which it can be dated. In 1983, a storm revealed a triple row of heavy, deep-driven oakwood stakes which were manifestly intended to protect the exposed sea side of the castle against marine erosion, as at Hoborg and Købingshoved. A dendrochronological analysis of the stakes carried out by the National Museum's department of Scientific Investigations in 1996 dated them to the middle of the fourteenth century. On the basis of its close relationship to the neighbouring Absalon's Fort the date of construction of Gråsten Fort should, however, be put at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The last of the castle mounds on Ærø, Borret, or Kongens Bakker (the King's Hills), is situated west of Ærøskøbing on a small headland in Stokkeby cove. The heavily quarried and eroded castle mound consists of a hill measuring 70 m x 70 with the remains of a low bank around the edge and surrounded by ditch behind a rampart. The form of the castle mound, and the occurrence of brick fragments, indicate a date in the fourteenth century.

### *Castle mounds on Tåsinge*

The most important castle on Tåsinge throughout the Middle Ages was the strongly fortified site of Kærstrup (Olsen & Bang 1992:86), the mound of

which is in the north-eastern area of the island. Kærstrup had a four-sided main castle mound surrounded by deep moats, with a substantial but extensively plough-eroded bailey with a storeyard to the north, originally also enclosed by ditches. The castle is first mentioned in 1387, when it was in the possession of the Crown. Eight years later Queen Margrethe granted it to the diocese of Fyn, which kept the castle up to the Reformation when it returned to the Crown. In the 1620's Christian IV had the old castle pulled down.

Another medieval castle was sited in Horseskov by the north coast of Tåsinge. This structure, which has now been completely levelled, was guarded by a ditch and bank on the land side. In the 1820's substantial cellar walls from a small, foundation-trenched building could still be seen on the castle mound. The remains of the storeyard of the castle and a demolished watermill are reported to have been discovered near the castle mound. No finds are known from the castle, which is believed to derive from the fourteenth century.

There may have been yet another fortified site on the north coast of Tåsinge, as a small tongue of land which projects into Svendborgsund has been separated from the land by a cross-cutting ditch. The site is called Saksenborg (Saxon Castle). It has not been excavated and is undated (Olsen & Bang 1992:89).

### CASTLE MOUNDS OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

On the back of Valdemar Atterdag's long and persistent campaign to capture all of Denmark, by fighting, as it were, from castle to castle, it was finally possible, in the 1360's, to bring the dissolution of the state to an end and to re-establish strong central authority. His daughter Margrethe (I) shrewdly continued his policy of consolidation. She did not simply fight over the castles but rather organized things so that they came into her possession by inheritance or purchase, and then had them demolished. By 1396, Margrethe had things so thoroughly under control that she could issue her famous decree forbidding all private castle-building (Olsen 1986:88). This ban seems to have been enforced, and even though it was lifted in King Hans's coro-

nation charter of 1483 the new aristocratic residences which were constructed on the islands south of Fyn in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries clearly show that the islands' noble families were then expecting more peaceful times. Egeløkke and Nedergård on Langeland, for example, both of which are mentioned as noble seats for the first time in the fifteenth century, were apparently never fortified. In those cases where newly built noble houses were surrounded by moats, as at Skovsgård on Langeland or Duke Hans the Younger's Søbygård in a vale below Søby Volde on Ærø, the function of the moat was evidently to impress and to demonstrate the owner's stature rather than to provide defence.

The nobleman's home in the Late Middle Ages was often constructed as a timber-framed building of three or four lengths (Olsen 1981). An example of a late, unfortified building of this kind has been studied at Navnegården, southern Langeland. On a small headland which stretches out into Humble Ålemose the foundations of a substantial four-length timber-framed homestead from about 1500 were excavated in 1985-86. The southern wing contained the well-preserved remains of a rock-built cellar measuring 7 m x 4 with a stone-tiled floor and a walled entrance facing north. This farmstead has not been definitely identified in the written sources. It may be the same site as a squire's homestead which is referred to in Helsned as early as the fifteenth century (Trap 1957:968). It is remembered locally as 'a pirates' castle' occupied by a family called Erlandsen. According to the tale, two maids from the house are supposed to have been murdered early one morning on their way to the service in Humble church (Lütken 1910:39).

#### SUMMARY

The reference to this minor aristocratic residence at Navnegård in folk tradition is in many ways typical of the important and persistent role the castle mounds play in the popular imagination. Similar legends and stories about fierce pirates, proud women and cruel barons are linked to these grass-clad or ploughed-over castle mounds virtually all over Denmark, where now, on the whole, only place names

ending in *-slot* or *-borg* (*fort* and *castle*) bear witness to buildings long gone.

With the results to date of the investigations of castle mounds south of Fyn an important step has been taken, in this area at least, towards retrieving the castle mounds from the realm of legend. On several points it has been possible to supplement or improve our knowledge of medieval castle-building. Here one thinks especially of the early datings of the presumably royal structures at Søby Volde and Tranekær, and the refuges at Borrebjerg and Guldborg, although also of the evidence for thirteenth- and fourteenth-century brick buildings on the small private castles at Lykkesholm and Heigned, and the small urban community in the lee of the castles at Købingshoved and Søby Volde.

The investigations have also emphasized the need to see the project through to the end. Several of the castle mounds are threatened with complete destruction through cultivation or coastal erosion, and in these cases surveying, sectioning and trial trenching needs to be undertaken without delay (cf. also Ericsson 1993:272; Andersen 1992:30). Such well-thought out and necessary work is in no way 'premature archaeological intervention' but simply reflects the reality of the situation, in contrast to the recent complacent assertion that 'the Danish castles are lying secure and well guarded by the Protection Act' (Liebgott 1993:24). To put it mildly, this is a reckless approach to the truth, and in the case of the archipelago has no basis in reality. Here, therefore, efforts are still being invested in limited investigations of all of the medieval castle mounds of the area. Only when this work has been completed will it be possible to produce a comprehensive overview of the architectural history of the castles, their relations with one another, and their function in medieval society. The significance of this will also extend far beyond the islands of the archipelago south of Fyn.

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