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Comment

by HENRIK THRANE

From Kristian Kristiansen’s (KK in the following) survey I have picked some problems of special interest to my own situation.

The national interest in the preservation of ancient monuments for future generations has loomed large in the development of our registration of antiquities and was used as a strong argument whenever these registrations were financed – and they were all financed by special funds. I agree that it is preferable to regard this great mass of information as a potential which still remains to be utilized for integrated regional studies. This realisation is not new, however (Mathiassen 1949, Ambrosiani 1964).

The national resurgence movement after 1863 was an explicable reaction to the loss of an important part of the realm, and the registration of ancient monuments can be seen as part of this movement. Without the popular support, which in part must be attributed to the high schools (Danish: Højskoler) I doubt if even an energetic agitator like Worsaae with his useful connections in the upper levels of society could have persuaded the government to invest in ancient monuments.

I think that KK exaggerates “the long sleep”. It was felt in the archaeological society that the down to earth methods of Sophus Müller had preserved Danish archaeology from the ideological misfortunes that befell our German colleagues.

The Müller tradition was revered and accepted as a still useful base for new work. The tacit accept of the belief in objectivity – in the field as well as in the study of the material – was a main feature of the fifties and sixties. Work was done at a rate per caput which probably outrates the present day literary production per archaeologist. While KK may think that the Müller tradition collapsed in the 1960’es and 1970’es, I do not agree. Work is still being produced in that solid Danish tradition though it is realized that objectivity is impossible even in the field. It is, however, still regarded as a goal to do a good objective registration of the features which the excavator selects as the relevant ones.

Danish Archaeologists with an interest in methods have shown an early interest in New Archaeology and can boast of sections and heretics just as they can further west, e.g. Trigger, Flannery and others.

I don’t regard the publication of what KK calls New Archaeology papers in foreign journals as signifying a rejection on the part of the Danish editors. It rather shows an interest in presenting the results internationally and also shows the personal links of the relevant authors.

It may sound absurd, but actually it was customary in the 1950’es to include social anthropology, ethnology, medieval and classical archaeology in the study of Prehistory because the study plan was so elastic – too elastic for some – that each student could compose his own study. Up to 1970 or even later it must be fair to say that most students were brought up on the old tradition sprinkled with bits of New Archaeology.

The reason why regional archaeologists have not published much may have been that they were too busy in the field – especially after the 1969 law. Even by 1970 there was no more than a balance between Copenhagen and the provinces. There was a marked tendency to stay in Copenhagen or Århus if one wanted to do research. That was simply where the collections were. Archaeologists who went to the smaller museums had poor libraries and little additional facilities for producing more than excavation reports.

I disagree strongly with the contention that local museums did not use the opportunities presented by the 1969 law. They plunged into rescue archaeology as soon as the first few years of reticence on the part of the national administration had been overcome. Some museums had by 1969 done rescue archaeology for 30 years on end! Several museums are now no more engaged in rescue archaeology than they already were in the 1970’es. Unfortunately the conflicts of the 70’es have not been resolved by the switch back to the National Museum of part of the national administration.

The most bitter struggle arose over the allocation of the preventive rescue work on the gas pipeline across Denmark. KK is partly to blame for this cleft which has become more important than the original issue. The local museums were not allowed to continue their earlier practice of doing the job from start to end. The central administration forced a division so that survey and trial excavations were made by staff from the central administration, while the museums were only allowed to do the eventual final excavation.¹ This completely irrational procedure has been upheld by the administration after its

move to the National Museum and will, I am afraid, be a continuous sore spot in the collaboration between local museums and central authorities.

The great archaeological innovation of the 1960's was the mechanization of large scale area excavations which made the dreams of the fifties come true. No longer did economy or time forbid the excavation of whole villages – albeit without floors and find layers. This has opened up completely new vistas of our understanding of Prehistoric societies and has made it possible to speak of villages with certainty in some cases and with plausibility in other cases.

New machinery has increased the effectivity of the removal of the topsoil manifold and other mechanical excavators have been applied to the heavier soils of East Jutland, Funen and Zealand so that now we are getting settlements outside the Jutish sand areas too. The eschewed legal/financial situation has led to awkward situations where e.g. a 30 m. wide strip across a village can be dug for public money because road or other authorities have to pay for it. The rest of the settlement may only be excavated if private funds can be raised in some clever way. This practice of digging segments of cemeteries of settlements on pipelines or motorways is really only a slight improvement on the old hit and run tactics where a single pit or a few odd graves were excavated and no more. Soon we shall have a long list of sites which ought to be excavated because of their potential information on settlement structure and economy of obscure periods or terrae incognitae. A reasoned policy for the solution to this problem will be one of the eminent problems of the next decade.

The very hard economic line taken by the administration of the natural gas pipeline excavations may be responsible for another problem which has already begun to make itself felt. It has become current usage to calculate all excavations in kr. pr. m² and to use the norms from the pipeline excavations for any sort of excavation. This is naturally a fallacy, as every excavation should be judged by its own conditions. It will be a loss not only of innocence but of substance if archaeology permits itself to be regulated by strict squaremeter prices based on rescue excavations whose standards must necessarily be below the desirable, not to speak of the optimal. Not only does this tendency exist in the minds of the people who are responsible for the budget, but there is a danger that it may contaminate the minds of the excavators so far that they will be unable to excavate in any other way.

If the object, the problem, and the conditions are present for a full scale oldfashioned scientific excavation it would be a disaster if it were to be ruled by the standards of rescue excavations. There should still be room for quality as well as for quantity.

This leads on to some of the questions I have put elsewhere (Thrane 1982). I have no doubt that excavation of entities rather than more or less accidental fragments of sites will be a major objective for the archaeology of the eighties. The main problem will however be carried over from the sixties and will only be slightly improved by the many trial excavations on pipe lines etc. This is fundamentally a problem of choosing the right site. i.e. the typical site.

By this I mean that archaeologists for generations have jumped at any site which looked exciting one way or the other. We have never bothered about which sites might be typical for a given period or a given region. If the great competition for funds for the total (and still expensive) excavation of whole settlements with their cemeteries, fields etc. is to end in something better than the survival of the smartest, serious consideration must be given to this problem. A better knowledge of potential sites will only come after concerted efforts at total registration with all available methods within regional frameworks.

We need a net of well excavated settlements with their cemeteries etc. from all major periods covering all major Danish landscapes. Furthermore we need a greater awareness of the subtleties of excavation, i.e. the application of the proper technique and strategy to each problem (e.g. Jeppesen 1981 for the use of trial pits to solve a specific problem).

In the sixties an attempt was made to interest the National Museum in a central archive for archaeological air photographs. This provoked no response at all. Now the National Agency for the Protection of Ancient Monuments has taken a laudable initiative towards the registration of ancient field systems (Sørensen 1982 and 1984). The task is probably even more imminent now than 20 years ago. Archaeological air photography will be indispensable in the effort to optimize our information about potential sites from which to pick the right ones for excavation. We urgently need research on the special Danish soil conditions which cannot be prepared immediately with the classical English chalklands or the French loesses (CBA 1983).

I would like to see a central effort to do a series of experiments on representative samples of Danish soils instead of each local museum having to make its own trial and error efforts. The bewildering multitude of films, cameras, soils, growth conditions etc. is not easily mastered by local archaeologists with enough to do already.

A similar problem concerns our knowledge (or lack of same) of what happens to the ploughland and to the overploughed monuments now that deep ploughing has characterized the Danish landscape during 30 years (cf. Jacobsen 1984).

This comment is another witness to a new trend in Danish Archaeology. Perhaps the very smallness of the archaeological society before the job explosion in the early sixties accounts for the old reticence from criticising one's colleagues. Norwegian Archaeological Review has pointed the way and I hope that Journal of Danish Archaeology will live up to this refreshing line. It is clear that our explanations are no more sacrosanct than the logics behind them and the material supporting them. Great archaeologists have had their less good days like everyone else. The critical review has been an art rarely practised seriously in Danish archaeology.

It is good to see the head of the Ancient Monuments Service express a sense of unity with the regional study of landscapes as the central interest. This is precisely what several of the regional museums have tried to do over the last ten years in strong opposition to the policy of the Central Administration – *vide supra*. The local museums were let down by those institu-

tions which might have supported the local efforts, the result being that we had to go abroad to have our phosphate analyses, pollen analyses, etc. done. I guess that a re-orientation at least of the Geological Survey potential for palynology is under way and this could probably prove the starting point of a most important trend in the 1980'es. Leading back to the organisation of the 1940'es when archaeologists and scientists worked closely together with a common goal. Perhaps the scientists felt that they were subordinated to the archaeologists. This could explain the emancipation trend of the peatbog laboratory of the National Museum.

I should like to know how many regional museums have settlement projects going. I think KK overemphasises their number. Let me mention the fact that my predecessor Erling Albrechtsen broke the tradition of local replicas of the National Museum all over the country by concentrating on the pre-history of the region Fyn (Albrechtsen 1951, Thrane 1980). Fyn is still the best example of what a small regional museum is (was) able to do by a sustained effort (Albrechtsen 1954–73). His publications are good examples of the possibilities as well as the limitations of an isolated provincial archaeologist working in the Müller tradition. There is still a great need for corresponding publications of other Danish regions.

It has been the pride of Danish archaeological university education that schools were not found. This is another relict of the Müller tradition, which has had great advantages but which has left the departments without their own research profiles. I agree with KK that it would be time for Copenhagen and Århus to formulate overall policies. A crucial question for the coming years will be the uniting of efforts and pooling of resources for a joint archaeological policy. Danish archaeologists have not been used to this sort of restraint on their own wishes and today no common forum for a formulation of a common policy exists. The new Archaeological Board could become the nucleus of such a forum, provided it is given the scope necessary for a leading role in policy making. One of the first things to do will be to create an overall view of what is going on and what is wanted in the various archaeological periods. This will have to be discussed generally and openly by all archaeologists in Denmark so that a consensus of opinion may be reached. This could become the most important innovation in the archaeology of the 1980'es where the continued pressure of land use and perhaps a revival of the building activities of Danish society, augmented by the metal detector bug, will mean that even increased central funding will be insufficient for many years to come.

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NOTE

1. It is a euphemism when KK (1983, 204) writes "regional museums carried out final excavations". The fact is that these museums were only allowed to do the final excavations as their share. There is no methodological reason for separating survey and (or) trial excava-

tions from the final excavation of pipeline or any other sort of archaeology. It is deplorable that the Archaeological Council (now Board) has not been willing to change this unhappy practice introduced by the National Agency for the Protection of Ancient Monuments and Sites. It will take some time before the bitter resentment caused by this unscientific practice can be overcome.

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Danish Archaeology in the 1980's – beyond theoretical poverty?

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1968 was in many ways an important year. The anti-authoritarian movement swept over cities and universities all over the industrialized world. Also Danish universities were affected – with minor exceptions. There was quiet at the institutes of archaeology, where nobody challenged the established structure and content of the studies, nor did anyone enquire into the role of archaeology in contemporary society.

But still the late 1960's, and early 1970's saw the beginning of a gradual reorientation within Danish Archaeology. This development was in concordance with, and stimulated by similar developments elsewhere, responding to growing