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ALBERT RECKITT ARCHAEOLOGICAL LECTURE

FARMS AND VILLAGES IN DENMARK FROM THE LATE BRONZE AGE TO THE VIKING PERIOD

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IT seems today that archaeological research is split up into different directions when the 'history before history' has to be interpreted. In fact there is little difference between so-called old-fashioned and modern methods in this subject. The objective is one and the same: to seek knowledge about the people behind the silent remains of material culture, structures as well as smaller artefacts.

This may seem to be rather too general an introduction to the subject that I have chosen to speak on today as a result of the British Academy's invitation to give a lecture, which I consider a great honour. It is indeed by using conventional methods that excavations and research during roughly the last twenty-five years have led to quite thought-provoking results relating to the social conditions and settlements of the era in Danish prehistory between about 1000 BC and the beginning of the Viking period—that is almost two thousand years.

When these results are to be presented to a wider circle than a small gathering of specialists, it seems reasonable to mention how we have arrived at our present situation, instead of just enumerating so many find-places and showing so many plans of buildings, farm complexes and villages. It might, too, be appropriate to say a little about the historical background to our research work.

It is well known that the National Museum of Denmark has been the wholly dominating institution in archaeology in my country, at any rate far into the present century. But it is almost unknown outside Denmark that, in 1893, the Museum's powerful director, Sophus Müller, as one of the first in Europe, succeeded in obtaining considerable funds from the state for

pure research projects. He used the major portion of this money, and the efforts of his colleagues, on a few selected tasks. Two of them produced unusually good results. First, the epoch-making and still entirely applicable studies of the neolithic battle-axe culture in Jutland, published in 1898, and then the equally important, interdisciplinary monograph on the mesolithic and neolithic kitchen middens, issued two years later. In 1897 Sophus Müller had already mentioned a third programme: studies on 'settlements from the later periods of Antiquity' and, in particular, those places 'where dwellings were located and life was carried on', to use his own words. In spite of much effort this project was not very successful: Müller himself took stock of the results in a couple of treatises, firstly dealing with the Iron Age, that is only the so-called Roman period, the first two centuries AD. This was in 1906. In 1919 he wrote about the settlements of the Bronze Age. Many investigations resulted in rich refuse layers and quantities of pottery and other objects, but no sites of buildings. Perhaps the reason for this was that the excavation technique used at that time (considered modern then) was better suited to kitchen middens than to later settlements.

It was in about 1922 that the National Museum, represented by Hans Kjær, was first able to investigate and publish several well-preserved house sites of the Early Iron Age. The excavations, at Ginderup in north-west Jutland, aroused interest in the archaeological world: they also constituted the start of Gudmund Hatt's epoch-making studies. As a member of the Museum staff he participated in one or two of the campaigns and quickly realized the potential of this research. Through roughly the following fifteen years he personally carried out numerous excavations of iron age buildings, settlements, and field systems (of 'Celtic field' type), particularly after he moved to the University as professor of ethno-geography. Hatt's work and publications are known internationally. When Johannes Brøndsted wrote his monumental *Danmarks Oldtid* (in the years 1938–40), his detailed descriptions of iron age farming communities and building forms were almost entirely based on Hatt's work. But there was knowledge of only a limited period, namely from about 100 BC to about AD 200. In 1960 Brøndsted issued a revised edition of his work, but it contained nothing new on iron age settlements—and nothing new on the previous Bronze Age either, although a couple of houses proper from the Late Bronze Age had been found in the meantime. However Brøndsted could not quite accept their validity.

By coincidence the same year (1960) saw the start of the new and extensive investigations of both bronze and iron age settlements that I will be discussing. During the last twenty-five years many individual reports on this work have become available both in Danish and in other languages, but virtually all of these are of a provisional nature: we are in the midst of extensive and exciting work, which is by no means complete, because almost every year new details are added to our present knowledge.

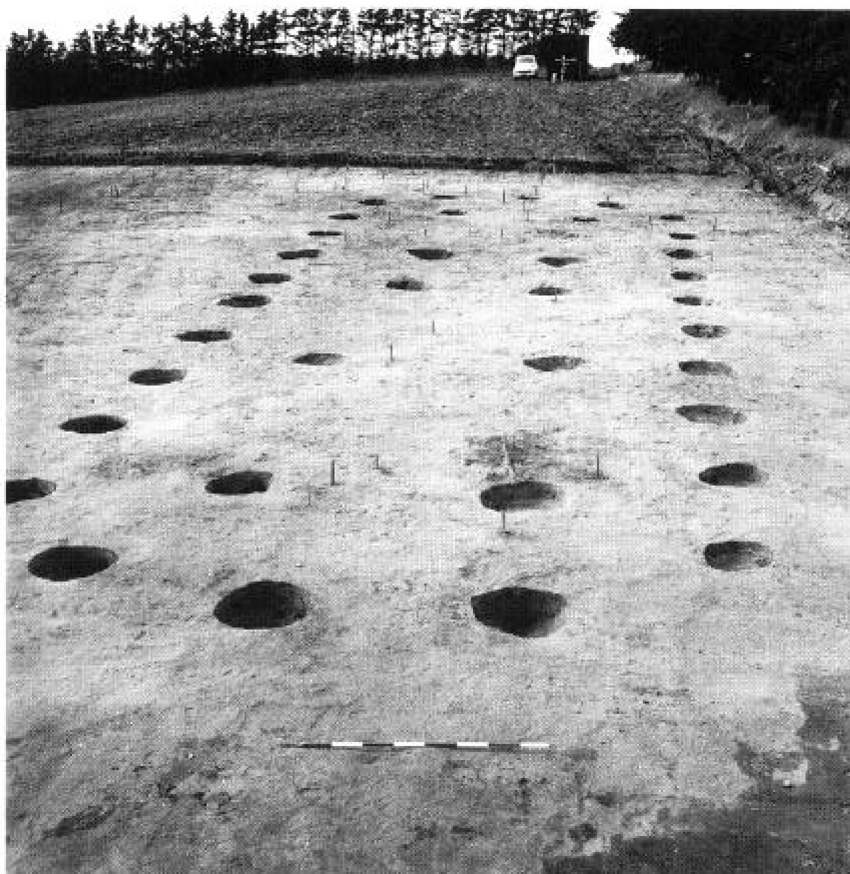
One of the reasons for progress must be sought in our excavation methods. Just as Gudmund Hatt some sixty years ago broke with the old Danish techniques of investigating settlements in sectors one metre square and began to work with areas of 200–500 square metres, around 1960 we discovered the possibilities that lay in the use of machines, as proper excavation tools and not just as a means of removing the covering soil layers. During the 1950s I had noted in several European countries the use of machines right down to the find layers. In Czechoslovakia bulldozers were used during the uncovering of the vast neolithic site at Bylany, though with both good and bad results. In Holland, at the same time, similar methods had come into use to cope with the extensive sites there, but these methods too I did not dare transfer to Danish sites after seeing the work.

It was a further coincidence that in 1960 I was forced to face this problem, because I had to take over the excavation of an early iron age settlement, at Grøntoft in west Jutland, even though it did not fit into my own fieldwork plans. At Grøntoft it was necessary to investigate an area roughly 60 by 30 metres. It was a site where the structures themselves had been destroyed by modern farming. Moreover, work had to be completed within one month. I had noticed how building contractors, when working on minor road and construction jobs, used tractors pulling small soil scoops, which could carry about a cubic metre of soil and which could peel this off in thin layers. The tractor had to be reversed over the lowest layers to remove the humus layer right down to the subsoil, without the heavy wheels coming into contact with this layer. It occurred to me that this method might help to solve our problem, but I was not very optimistic about the outcome. However I was mistaken. When the first length had been uncovered all the traces of the wall and roof posts of the structures appeared so clearly in the pale subsoil that plans were shown more clearly than if excavation had been carried out in a heavy culture layer. Thus—under favourable circumstances such as a thin humus layer and a sandy or gravelly

subsoil without too many stones—we had found a method for uncovering the traces of posts and fences embedded in the soil, not only of individual houses but also of large settlements, because the soil could be removed as far away as necessary by means of the tractor. With a minimum of labour—a tractor driver, a workman to direct the machine and clear up the area afterwards, as well as two or three students for the actual investigation, measuring, and recording of all structures—it was soon possible to excavate in a fully responsible manner between 200 and 300 square metres *a day*. I should add that younger archaeologists today do not use this type of machine but a more recent one which works in widths of 8 to 10 metres, and can also work in wet weather and in heavier clay soils.

From a practical viewpoint there is both a technical and an economic background to our modern settlement excavations. Even though the use of machines can considerably reduce costs, effective excavations are expensive affairs. Useful results depend today on total excavation: a single or a few building sites are not particularly important because they can never shed light on a whole settlement and its plan. A few more words on research policy and economy may therefore be appropriate. For many years Danish research has had the privilege of support given by several large foundations, first and foremost the Carlsberg Foundation. In addition, in 1962, the Government also started to grant special sums for such purposes, and in 1968 new legislation established five research councils, among them one for the humanities, these, too, having relatively large appropriations. The individual councils were able to set up commissions for special projects, and one of the first under the humanities was charged with the study of bronze and iron age settlements. The problem then was that all the museums in Denmark already had far too few funds for large scientific excavations, and at the same time modern agricultural methods had become a serious threat, in particular to settlements from antiquity, because of deep-ploughing. The commission in question worked for eight years (1968–76) with a sufficiency of funds (totalling more than three million Danish kroner), and could choose its tasks on a purely scientific basis, although fieldwork was always carried out in collaboration with central or local museums.

It was fortunate that when the commission started work no detailed plans had been drawn up as to how it was to go into action. It is one thing to make a theoretical list of areas in need of study, but a very different thing to carry out the tasks in practice. Fortuity or luck plays a part in such tactics, but after a cautious



Late bronze age house site of (presumably) earlier date than that shown in Fig. 1. The wall posts are heavy and do not indicate entrances. Bjerg, Site B, west Jutland. (Photo: C. J. Becker 1973)

PLATE II

Painted house urn from Stora Hammar, Scania. Slightly restored. Height 30 cm.
(Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm)

start the commission decided on several promising subjects. I shall start by saying something about the late bronze age settlements which, in an archaeological report, should be discussed before those of the Iron Age.

I mentioned earlier that at the time that Brøndsted revised his book in 1960 he knew of (and mentioned in a note) a few late bronze age house sites, but that he was unable to accept the validity of observations that seemed to contradict one of his theories: namely, that traces of buildings from the Bronze Age are not found, because people at that time had a somewhat nomadic existence and lived in huts or similar flimsy structures which, of course, would leave no obvious signs of their existence. But some ten years later a further find appeared: three well-preserved sites of large, three-aisled houses which definitely dated from the latest Bronze Age (Fig. 1). However this, too, was an isolated find.

Nevertheless, just a couple of years later, we suddenly came upon numerous houses of the Bronze Age. We were working on

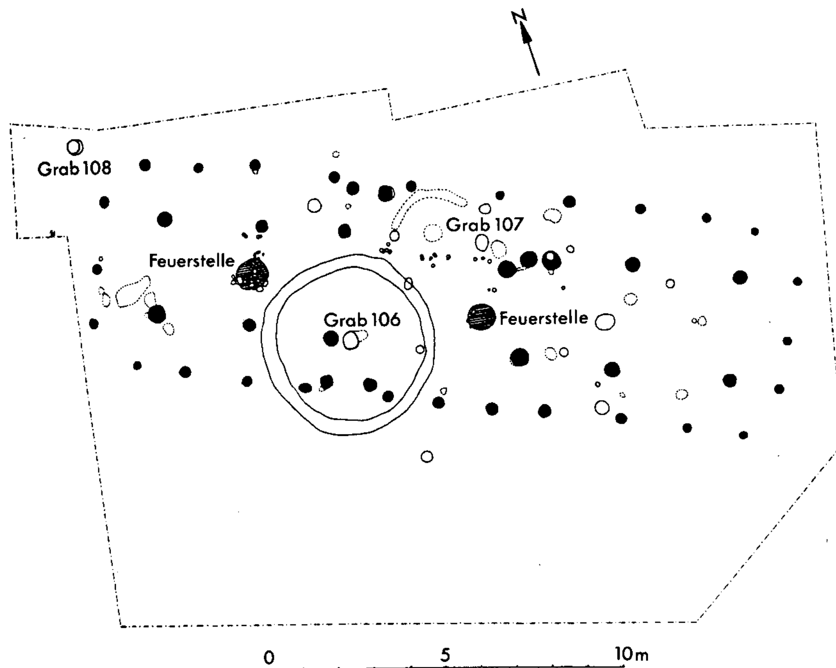


FIG. 1. A house site, 19.5 m long, of the Late Bronze Age (Montelius VI). Only the post-holes and the two hearths are plotted on the drawing; all other holes and some (later) cremation graves inside the area are indicated. Ristoft, west Jutland. (Becker, 1968)

the Grøntoft villages (more about these later): the new technique involving the rational use of machines was firmly established, and the new commission provided us both with funds for new excavations and also afforded us the opportunity of making plans ourselves, as well as—and this is just as important—the opportunity of changing them again. Based on the promising results of the earliest iron age settlement (at Grøntoft), plans were made to discover the settlement density at that time and thus to gain some idea of the population density. There were several ways to go about the task. For example, Professor St Joseph from Cambridge had, from the air, localized a small burial ground a few kilometres south of our area. Because of their circular ditches the small barrows could still be distinguished in the cultivated fields. Trial investigations were made here: the result was a much damaged cemetery dating from the right period, but at first no iron age buildings. On the other hand there proved to be numerous settlement remains, also of houses, from the Late Bronze Age. We could not leave these uninvestigated, and during the next two years at least thirty-three sites of buildings were brought to light inside an area 350 metres long and up to 50 metres wide.

Another lead to early iron age sites was utilizing the knowledge of archaeologically interested local staff, who might know of finds or large grindstones in the shapes common in the Early Iron Age, and also in the Late Bronze Age. If such stones are found when working in the fields there must be, I thought, a settlement quite close by, for nobody in their right mind would move such large stones farther than necessary—unless for constructing buildings. Such a find had appeared at a location some kilometres distance from Grøntoft, where in addition there were records of Celtic fields (which only occur in the Early Iron Age in Denmark). What we found here was again of the Bronze Age—for example, a fine house, almost 28 metres long, that was excavated—but still no iron age houses.

Third time lucky goes the saying, so we had more hope when another farmer, whose land lay a couple of kilometres to the north, discovered a grindstone and other settlement traces which could have belonged to the Early Iron Age. I clearly remember the day when—of course with the site owner's permission—I sent the large tractor and our experienced foreman out to this spot. Some hours later I went to see how things were going and was met with the remark, 'This doesn't work either, bronze age houses again.'

As a result we gave up plans to find more early iron age villages and concentrated on bronze age houses during the next three years, choosing sites where there were practical possibilities of uncovering large areas that had not suffered too much later disturbance. By then there were several areas of interest because we had learnt what to look for. Today there is no problem in finding bronze age house sites: the secret is that, as a rule, they are located on high-lying ground, in contrast to early iron age settlements. As a result of their position bronze age buildings have been at greater risk of damage from later cultivation—something that started with intensive ploughing in the Early Iron Age. In the area in west Jutland where we were working in those years, of only about 10 by 10 kilometres, evidence was revealed of ten sites of bronze age buildings, and two of these were (almost) entirely unearthed. With material comprising a good hundred building sites, we could then describe the typical longhouse and gain an impression of the character of the settlement. Later our information was confirmed by studies carried out all over Denmark and in Scania (which was in fact Danish both from an ethno-geographical and a political viewpoint until the seventeenth century AD).

The most important type of building was the large longhouse with two rows of inner roof-posts and a less strongly constructed, and therefore not always preserved, wall line with rounded gables and two entrances in the long sides, as a rule facing each other (Fig. 1). Hearths and floors were preserved only exceptionally because, as mentioned earlier, we generally worked at a deeper level because of later disruptions. A clearly differentiated livestock area, obvious from the marked stall partitions, was only found in a few cases, and never of the type that became common in the Early Iron Age.

The average late bronze age house is large compared with corresponding early iron age buildings. The length varies between 10 and 25 metres, in a few cases even up to 33 metres, while the width correspondingly lies between 5 and 8 metres. The latter measurements are remarkable because we first find such wide buildings again at the end of the Iron Age, that is one thousand years later. It is easy enough to increase the length of a house, but a width of more than 5 to 6 metres requires not only excellent timbers but also highly skilled carpentry techniques. The theory of bronze age man's flimsy huts has proved somewhat untenable.

Only a few examples of the house plans are shown here, and it

must be recalled that many details are difficult to bring out because of the state of preservation. At present we know of only two variants of the longhouse, one with a relatively thin wall and clearly marked entrances, the other with a very strong wall consisting of large, more widely spaced posts, but without visible marking of the entrances (Pl. I). Perhaps these two are an earlier and a later type within the Late Bronze Age. But what was this large roofed area used for? We do not know, because, among other things, we lack any evidence of a livestock area for larger domestic animals. Were these houses for the use of one or more families? We do not know this either, even though the presence of a hearth at both ends of a house, as found in a few cases, may hint at double occupancy. This applies too to the (hitherto) oldest but somewhat different building of this type, which was found beneath a barrow dating from the Middle Bronze Age (Montelius III), and therefore particularly well preserved.

What did these bronze age houses look like? A reconstruction based only on the holes of posts embedded in the soil seems doubtful, not least to non-archaeologists. Surprisingly there is a contemporary model of such a house. There is a small group of late bronze age pottery shaped as buildings, but in most cases these probably represent small storehouses. In the Stockholm Museum, however, there has long been a house urn found in Scania, shown here in a slightly restored condition (Pl. II). It was earlier considered to be a small round hut, but closer study has revealed it to be oval, and in reality it represents a longhouse with rounded gables. Paint indicates two entrances facing each other as well as a wall and a high roof. We actually know what these large longhouses may have looked like.

So much for the houses, but what of the character of the settlement and its occupation? The sites comprising many houses in Jutland are located on lime-deficient soil, where no animal bones have survived at all and where no proper livestock areas have been found. Moreover cultivated fields are at present unknown; observations from eastern Denmark do not necessarily apply here either. We must return to the excavation plans. I mentioned briefly that settlement where we started with iron age graves and ended up with at least thirty-three sites of bronze age houses situated on a ridge in the terrain roughly 350 metres long (Fig. 2). We imagined that this site was totally excavated, but a couple of years later the modern main road had to be widened, and it was revealed that there were bronze age buildings also east of the excavated area; but by then there was no possibility of

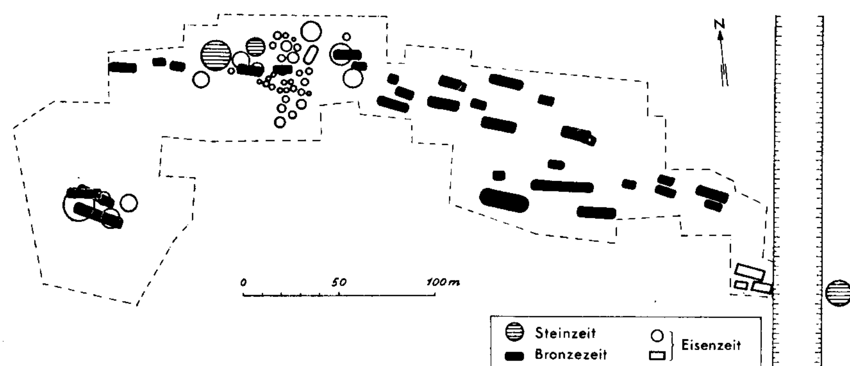


FIG. 2. Simplified plan of bronze age settlement at Spjald, west Jutland. Early iron age barrows and house sites are shown *unhatched*, neolithic barrows *hatched*. (Becker, 1972)

continuing the excavation. This raised the question: were we dealing with villages or individual farmsteads? This problem has been much discussed among Danish colleagues in recent years, and not only in relation to the Bronze Age. When archaeologists mention the find of a village they need to have definite evidence of it indeed being such an assemblage, particularly in discussions with ethnologists, historians, and other scholars.

The 'village' problem is an important one and I must say a few words about it. Danish villages from the Middle Ages and later are often remarkably small compared, for example, with what we know from Central Europe. In the debate a few of my colleagues and myself have attempted to draw up a definition of a prehistoric village: there must be at least three independent economic units, that is farms, and they must be contemporary, in the strictest meaning of the word, so that they can function only by means of common economic arrangements. In historical times this is easier to describe by means of written sources. In purely prehistoric contexts the requirements for strict contemporaneity are quite crucial. It is not enough to uncover some ten houses which can perhaps be dated to one and the same archaeological period (at best within one century). Here we are dealing with people and their dwellings, so a span of one hundred years would cover several generations. At present we have no possibility of confirming the contemporaneity of two or more houses on a late bronze age settlement. It so happens that on the site just mentioned trials were also carried out using carbon-14 dating of a series of fire pits. These show, just as the pottery finds do, that the area was inhabited throughout some four to five hundred

years of the Bronze Age. This does not in my opinion prove the existence of a village.

Neither was there a village on the settlement site that we excavated a couple of years later, and where the hitherto greatest number of building sites was revealed. This settlement lay some three kilometres north of Grøntoft. We hoped to excavate the area totally, or rather the areas, for it appeared that there were two groups of buildings with a distance of about 160 metres between them. I will show you only one schematic plan of the most certain building sites, because the actual plans are extremely complicated as a result of repeated habitation often on the same spot.

Group A (Fig. 3) lay on the highest ground, and comprised at least thirty-two bronze age houses inside an area *c.* 200 metres long. In addition there were ten small early iron age farmsteads. The dots indicate the presumably older longhouses of the Bronze Age, white indicates the other bronze age building sites, in fact two distinct groups. In between, shown in black, are the iron age houses. Similar circumstances are seen on site B which comprises both early and late bronze age buildings, as well as a single larger farm complex from the earliest Iron Age. Both A and B were inhabited throughout several centuries and presumably they existed largely at the same time. Even here there is no evidence of a village community in the Bronze Age.

Perhaps I have let the bronze age settlements take up too much time but, for one thing, very little has been written about them so far—and here the present lecturer is much to blame. For another, considering the method, they are interesting examples

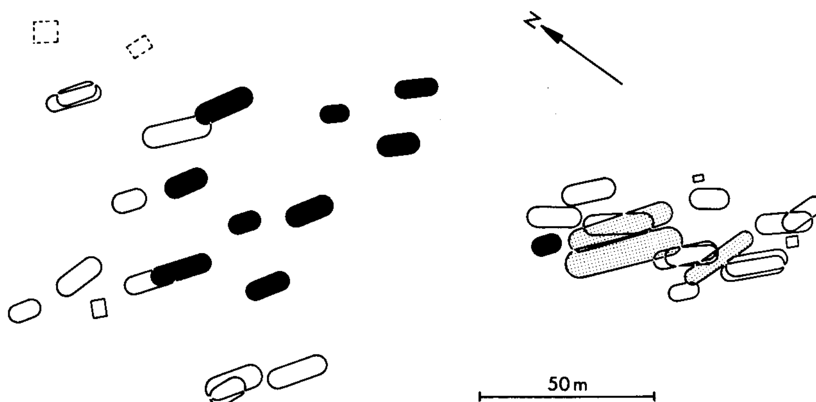


FIG. 3. Simplified plan of settlement Bjerg A, west Jutland. Early iron age house sites are shown in *black*, late bronze age houses in *white*; the presumably earlier type is *dotted*. (Becker, 1980)

of how a few years' excavation can totally alter our picture of both building shapes and settlement patterns during a whole archaeological period.

The dividing line between the Bronze Age and the Pre-Roman Iron Age in the Nordic area was, as most such boundaries, set up about a hundred years ago and, by and large, it has been retained by scholars, even though in several cases it does not coincide with a corresponding distinction in culture history. This does not apply, however, to the actual dividing line—around 500 BC—where recent research has proved both continuity and also quite radical changes in types of house, settlement and perhaps economy. We are fortunate in having good data relating to the latest Bronze Age (Montelius VI) and now to the next century too, that is to the very earliest Iron Age.

For practical reasons I shall discuss the roughly 500-year long Pre-Roman period in one section. Once more to refer back to Brøndsted's work of 1960, groups of farms (presumably villages) from the last two centuries of this period were already known. However, the whole of the earlier 200- to 300-year period was represented only by small settlements and a few houses—although, after Hatt's studies of our Celtic fields, intensive exploitation of even the poor soils in central and western Jutland had to be reckoned with.

Two extensive and successful excavations have now shown us villages proper from the Early and the Late Pre-Roman Period. The finds have already been made available to international circles (for example in survey form in Jørgen Jensen's, *The Prehistory of Denmark*, 1982), so that I need only deal with some supplementary information of special relevance. Grøntoft, near Ringkøbing, was—as I have mentioned earlier—not only the place where the new excavation technique was developed but, by a stroke of luck, our first partial result was the first conclusive evidence of the plan of an early village. This plan, which has already been published several times, is shown in Fig. 4: two phases are indicated on it, but only the earliest fulfils the requirements of strict contemporaneity of buildings. This is shown by unbroken lines. Evidence builds upon two circumstances: the obvious fence (surrounding an area about 90 by 30 metres) implies that a number of buildings had been planned and were erected at one and the same time. Next, the fill in the many post holes and ditches gave valuable information. In some

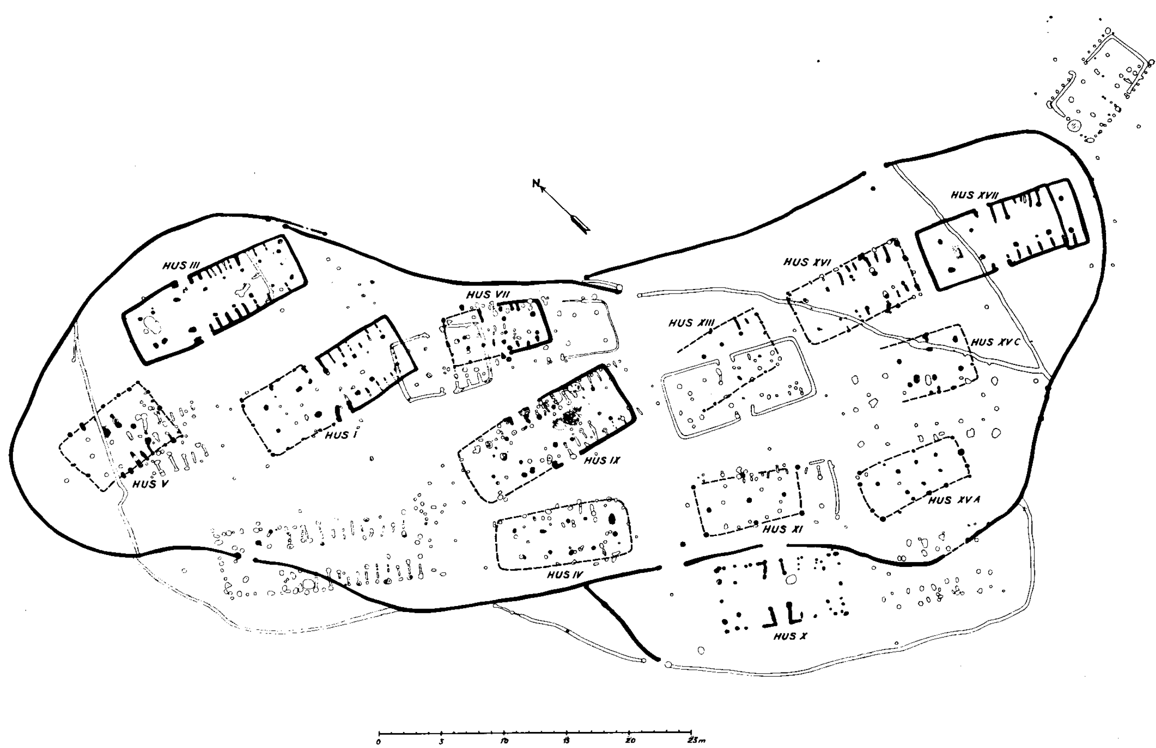


FIG. 4. The complete village at Grøntoft, west Jutland (3rd cent. BC). Only the first phase is shown by *unbroken lines*. (Becker, 1965)

structures this consisted of pure humus, while similar holes in others were filled with charcoal, burnt clay and other culture traces. For practical reasons the individual holes will always be rather wider than the timbers to be placed in them. Buildings and fences with pure humus fill must have been erected on a previously uninhabited area, while all the other structures must have been set up where habitation, or a catastrophe involving fire, had coloured the ground surface. Among the oldest structures were five large longhouses containing livestock areas; these buildings represented farms or economic units. In addition there were some smaller buildings with room for only a few domestic animals, or entirely without a livestock area; here function and affiliation are more uncertain. The evidence we have here fulfils the requirements discussed earlier for defining a prehistoric village. The first phase of the Grøntoft village consisted of a total of thirteen buildings. However, it is impossible to say how many of the other buildings were really contemporary: there could be two or more phases—for example, the surrounding fence had been altered twice.

This was as far as we reached at Grøntoft during 1963. Why did we not stop? A couple of years earlier I had excavated a small building on a field slightly farther north, and during the large village excavation a small building had appeared just outside the fence. This was of a slightly different construction but also Pre-Roman in date. A couple of hours' work in trial trenches showed that several buildings lay on the area, and in the following year we found a group of small farms and houses representing one or a couple of villages, rather earlier than the large one. We thought that we would stop here, but then new factors turned up by chance. Naturally enough our activities had been reported at length in the local newspapers. One of the neighbouring farmers obviously felt that quite enough had been written about Grøntoft: he set his plough somewhat deeper in the soil than usual and subsequently reported to me that he had more black marks on his field than there were at Grøntoft and that we were welcome to investigate them. Then it became very difficult to stop. Campaigns during the next six years exceeded all expectations. We unearthed a total of some 150,000 square metres and recorded around 250 sites of buildings (Fig. 5); with few exceptions, all dated from the time between the fifth and third centuries BC. It was clear that we were faced with one—perhaps two—smaller villages similar in nature to that first excavated, although without a common fence system, so that no individual

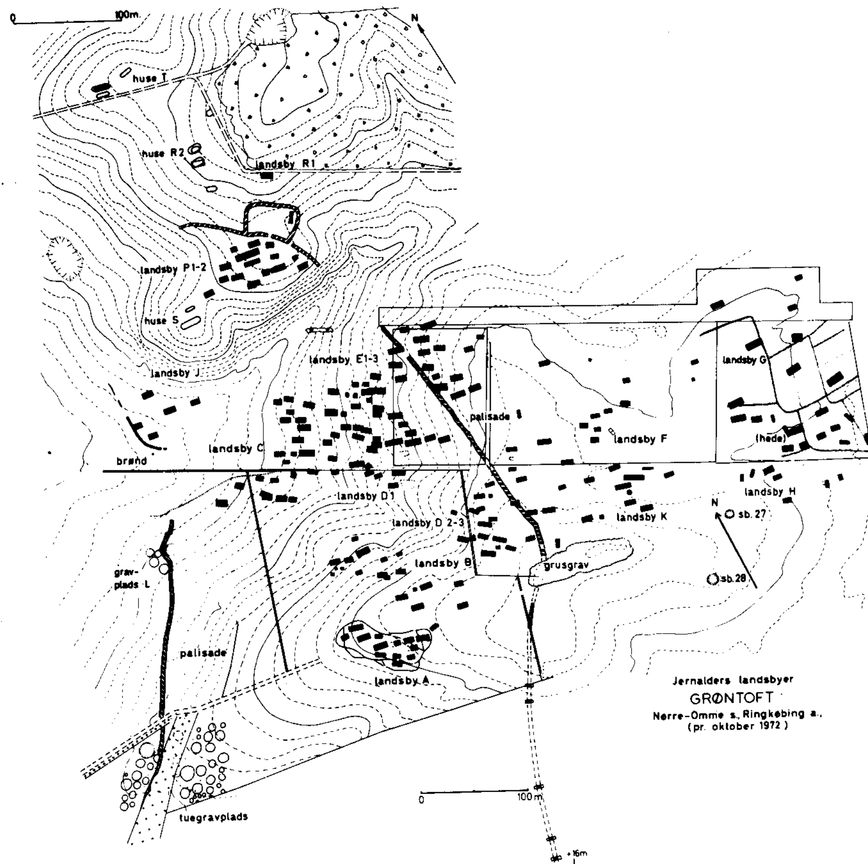


FIG. 5. The Grøntoft settlements after ten years of excavations. Pre-Roman house sites are shown in *black*, late bronze age sites (in the northern part) in *white*. (Becker, 1982).

phases could be distinguished. Within this roughly 300-year time span the village must have been moved and moved—I do not know the reason why with any certainty—and each time the structures were demolished and the area put to the plough once again. As a result there were no visible signs of the sites, so when Gudmund Hatt, some thirty years earlier, had plotted a large number of Celtic fields on the heath just at this spot, he had seen no traces of any structures.

If the Grøntoft result is typical, it explains the lack noted hitherto of buildings and villages from the early Pre-Roman period. The individual habitation only remained on a location for the space of one generation and was then moved, shorter or longer distances, within its occupation area, the earlier village site reverting to cultivated field. Only our new excavation methods were able to reveal such a pattern.

Perhaps I should say a few words about the other structures on the plan. To the west are the remains of two small burial grounds—far from large enough for all the inhabitants throughout 300 years. In addition there are some very strongly built palisades, contemporary with the settlement, for which I can give no explanation at present. Finally, farthest north, are ten typical bronze age houses, scattered around on quite high-lying ground. I do not think there is any continuity connecting them to the villages: perhaps the solution to this puzzle lies beneath the small plantation which definitively put an end to excavations here.

About a hundred years later than the latest villages at Grøntoft is the village at Hodde near Varde, in south-west Jutland. The site had been known for several years, because a small sector had been recorded by air photography, before the Research Council's commission was able to excavate the area totally in 1971–3, under the direction of Steen Hvass. Apart from preliminary reports, Hvass has now issued the final book on the results. Therefore I shall only discuss this work briefly. Hodde is a large village community dating from the Late Pre-Roman period and founded in the second century BC. The key to the interpretation of this site is in part the common palisade—surrounding an area up to 160 by 90 metres—and in part the less strongly built fences enclosing the individual farm complexes. Therefore the individual phases can be distinguished with reasonable certainty. It was possible to identify twenty-seven proper farm complexes at the time when the village was at its largest (Fig. 6). Each farm consisted of one to three buildings, of which the longhouse normally contained space for ten to twenty larger domestic animals. All farms were located along the palisade, thus leaving a large area without buildings in the centre. It has later proved possible to trace this type of village through the Iron Age and into the Middle Ages. One farm was larger than the others and maintained its place in the village through all phases. Contemporary graves elsewhere show that there occur a few graves containing richer objects just at this time. These are the first indications of an economic and perhaps social stratification of the iron age community. I deliberately refrain from talking about 'chiefs' or 'princes': all we know is that one family was richer than the others in the local community.

I said that several phases could be distinguished at Hodde. When Steen Hvass first published his plans, I was surprised to note that in the earliest stage the palisade was far too large in relation to the few contemporary farms. Later excavations

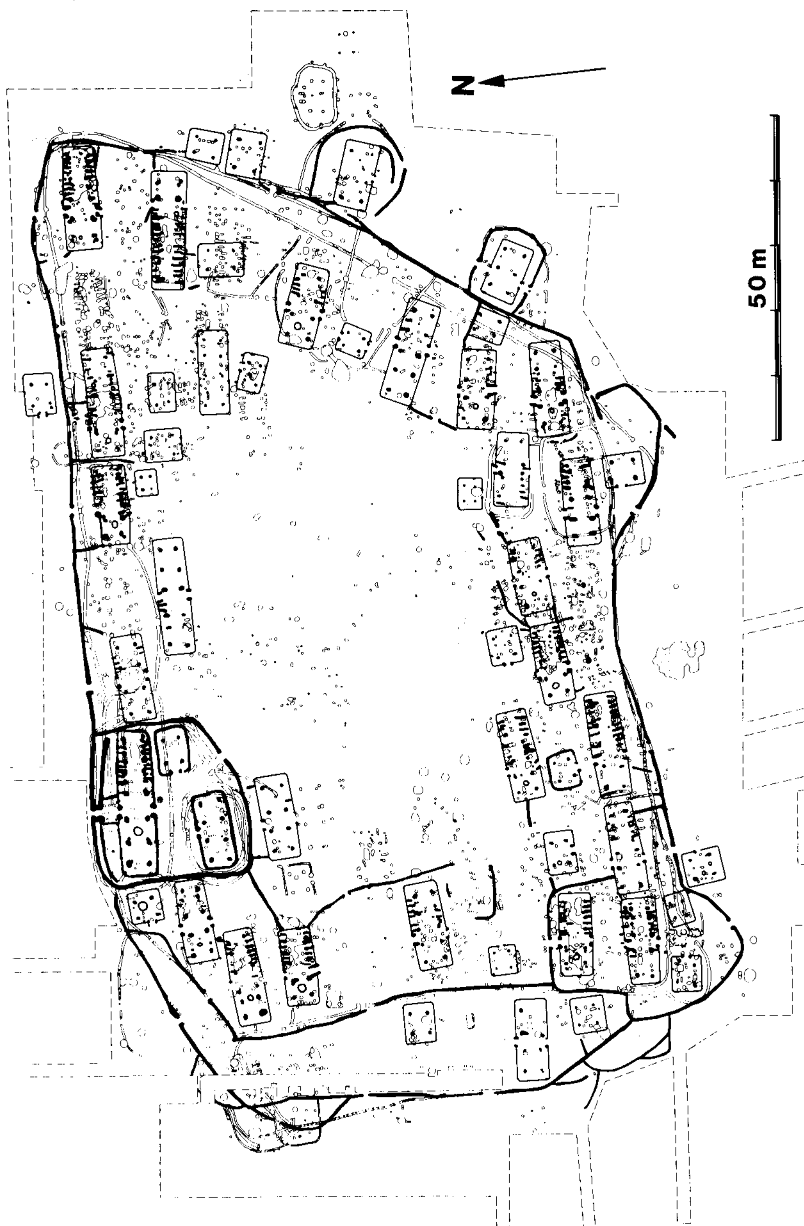


Fig. 6. Pre-Roman village at Hodde, south-west Jutland. Third phase. (Hvass, 1985)

elsewhere have given us the explanation. Hodde was not a village subjected to frequent relocation, such as Grøntoft, nor was it a community that built up rapidly only to disappear after a couple of centuries. Here we have reached an era of the Iron Age in which the settlement pattern has altered. There were still relocations within the occupation area of a village, but by now a couple of centuries passed between each move. The first phase at Hodde must have been preceded by a forerunner located in its vicinity and undiscovered; thus this phase involved a gradual removal to the new place.

After the last phase the inhabitants moved their settlement some 400 metres to the south-east. We know the location but for practical reasons it is only partly excavated.

Comparing the Grøntoft and Hodde villages, the former (with the common fence) contained space for sixty to seventy larger domestic animals (presumably cattle), while the livestock area at Hodde could have contained up to 400 animals. In corresponding fashion we reckon very roughly with sixty to seventy inhabitants (about ten families) at Grøntoft, while Hodde might have been the home of 200 to 300 people. No direct comparison can be made between the two, because Grøntoft lies in an area of poor, marginal land, where settlers in Pre-Roman times had to cultivate old heathland, whereas conditions at Hodde were far more favourable, this village—on more fertile soil—being surrounded by widespread pastures, thus affording excellent grazing for cattle.

Total excavation can give a reliable picture of society at that time, but so long as there are so few places such as Hodde and Grøntoft we do not know if observations at individual locations are typical or not. Other excavations have already indicated that the picture of Pre-Roman society was more complicated. Just to take one example: at Hodde one of the farms was larger and richer than the others. Similar, and contemporary, complexes have been found elsewhere, but they are not directly affiliated to a village. I have two examples. Figure 7 comprises a farmhouse with livestock area and another large building without stalls, as well as a small, conclusively identified smithy. The surrounding fences show that the complex was rebuilt a couple of times, but we found no traces of other habitation in close proximity to it. The other example is a complex consisting of four buildings, three large, one small, inside a common palisade, and this too is an isolated farm complex on its own.

Let me return to the plan of the large village at Hodde (Fig. 6).

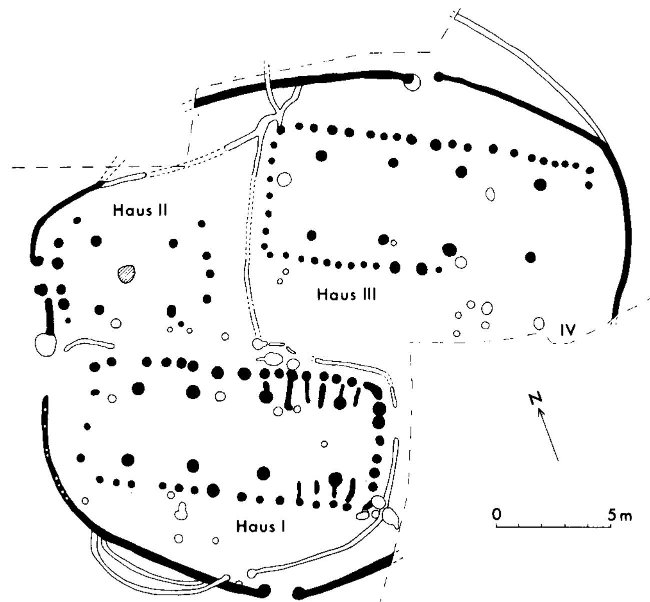


FIG. 7. An individual farm (*c.* 2nd cent. BC), Grønbjerg skole, west Jutland. (Becker, 1980)

Both types of house and the settlement as a whole are known throughout the next couple of centuries—our so-called Roman era. And here we find ourselves in the midst of the rich material that the previous generation of archaeologists excavated in the years 1920 to 1940. The last decades have increased the number of finds and structures, particularly on settlements in north Jutland, where a special method of building led to the creation of small 'tells', preserved up to a height of only two metres. The house walls were supported by stacks of turf, so that the culture layer was much increased in depth, keeping pace with the often lengthy period of settlement at these sites. But these kinds of deposit afford little if any chance of distinguishing the individual village, counting its farm units, and reckoning the livestock numbers. Already in the 1920s it was realized that this type of site must represent villages. An analysis of older and more recent excavations shows that some villages were set out in the same way as at Hodde, that is with the farms located around an open space. But there were other types of site and other forms of occupation. Many settlements of north Jutland on more fertile soil, but without nearby pastures, possessed far fewer animals. On the other hand, large grain stores have been found in several

buildings, implying that the main occupation could have been arable farming. Professor Hatt's largest excavation, Nørre Fjand on the west coast of Jutland, revealed only a few farms with large livestock areas: but other sites showed that fishing supplemented the economy here. This evaluation may seem a little negative compared with the many new results. But we must not forget that it was the old excavations that shed light on many details of the construction of the houses, on the dwelling areas, and on the layout of the livestock area, so that later it was possible to interpret the traces that machine archaeology sketched for us in the subsoil beneath the floor horizon.

During the third century there were many changes in the settlement, in the house types, and perhaps in the types of occupation, and none of the large settlements show any direct continuity. This situation has been recognized for some time: in 1960 Brøndsted referred to the idea that he and others then held that a move might have taken place at this time to the present-day villages, many of which have been inhabited since the Middle Ages. Professor Axel Steensberg tried to elucidate this question by excavating in extant and deserted villages. He collected an impressive amount of information on mediaeval and renaissance farm sites, but in no case could he trace settlement farther back than the eleventh century.

We now know quite a lot about villages during the period from the third to the eleventh centuries—all of eight hundred years. They hide beneath our cultivated fields, and they only came to light through the new excavation methods. The best site that we have so far found lies at Vorbasse in southern central Jutland. Steen Hvass has been working here for twelve years. To begin with he distinguished three stages of a large fourth- to sixth-century village, the plans of which are already known through preliminary reports (for example, in *Acta Archaeologica*). Thanks to favourable preservation conditions, and the many fences, the following picture can be deduced: by now the individual farm-houses were larger than before (Fig. 8), often about 30 and up to 45 metres in dimension, but they maintain the earlier division of the house into a dwelling at the west end, a large livestock area—housing some twenty to thirty animals—, and finally an area farthest east whose function is still a matter of guesswork. In several cases there is so wide an entrance into this eastern part through the gable end that farm carts could have been driven into it. In addition to this main building there were one or two smaller ones, and the total complex was surrounded by a fence

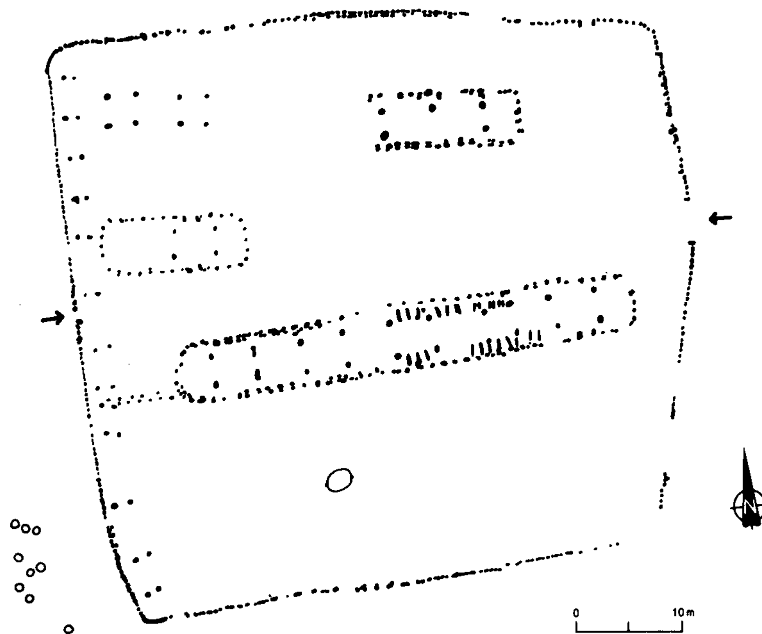


FIG. 8. A typical farm, 4th cent. AD, in the village at Vorbasse, central Jutland. (Hvass, 1979)

enclosing some 1000 to 2000 square metres of land. At that time Vorbasse was a large, rich village containing as it did between twenty and twenty-five such farm complexes at a time. The overall plan was not like that at Hodde because the complexes were erected more in parallel rows (Fig. 9). The relocations were over such small distances that it was more a case of a gradual displacement of the settlement.

Today we know that the average farmsteads looked like this in both west and east Denmark throughout the fourth to sixth centuries. We also know that the complexes were grouped into villages, but in almost all the areas where they have appeared it was impossible for practical reasons to excavate more than a few of them. However, I can tell you about one other complete village, because last summer saw the completion of another extensive excavation at Nørre Snede, about 40 kilometres north-east of Vorbasse. Here it is possible to trace a village from the third to the seventh century (Fig. 10). During all this time it consisted of eight to ten more or less equally large farm complexes of the 'normal' type. The overall plan of the village resembles that of Hodde, that is the farms were located around

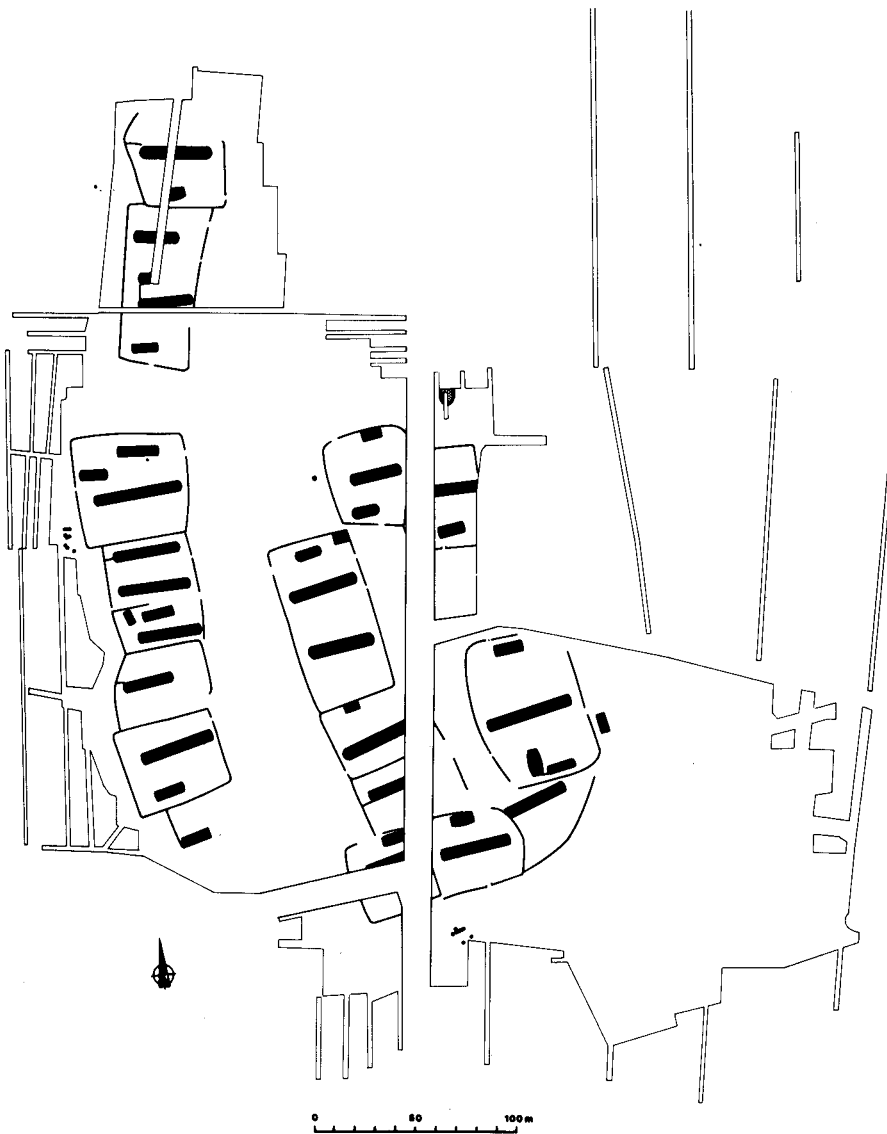


FIG. 9. The fourth-century village at Vorbasse, central Jutland. (Hvass, 1979)

an open space. At roughly 100-year intervals the village was relocated, but the move was only over a short distance. The latest phase dates from the sixth or seventh century; thereafter the village moved a rather greater distance, perhaps a couple of hundred metres—but we cannot follow its further history because modern buildings have been erected on its site. Objects dating from the Viking period appear when people dig the gardens of these houses.

FIG. 10. Preliminary plan of the villages at Nørre Snede. The numbers indicate the central places of the different stages. 1 = 3rd cent. AD; 2 = 4th cent.; 3 = 5th cent.; 4 = 6th to 7th cent. (one or two stages). Two neolithic barrows also shown. The last phase with its big farms are specially marked. (Courtesy of T. Egebjerg Hansen and Kulturhistorisk Museum, Vejle)

For many years the origin and development of the Danish village has been a main theme of research in archaeology, history and ethnology in my country. I mentioned earlier that, twenty-five years ago, the results were summed up as follows: in the Late Pre-Roman and Early Roman period there was evidence that the village existed as a cultural-historical concept, and it was easy to imagine that it was these villages that could be traced from the early Middle Ages, in spite of the roughly 800-year gap without finds. I have told you why we cannot yet talk of villages of the Bronze Age, in spite of much new material dating from this time.

As a settlement form, villages appeared in the earliest Iron Age, about 500 BC, and thereafter they can now be traced without a break up to the sixth, perhaps the seventh, century AD.

During the last twenty-five years we have, moreover, been able to fill in a little of the large gap from the other side, namely the Viking era, that is the ninth to the eleventh century. Perhaps some of you will have taken the title of my lecture to cover, too, a report on the important, almost revolutionary results that a number of my colleagues have achieved in this sphere: but the rural settlements of the Viking era are so extensive a subject that it would need a full lecture. Thus all I can do is touch upon some of the problems relating to village continuity. Many of the new finds are, by the way, mentioned by Else Roesdahl in the English edition of her excellent book, *Viking Age Denmark* (1982).

In the last three years of the Research Council commission, we concentrated its work on Viking sites, but no reasonable conclusion was reached because the extent of these complexes was underestimated, although we did uncover some 300 sites of houses that could be combined partly into villages and partly into farm complexes of the rich and powerful. However, work has continued at two locations and this has decisively supplemented our knowledge. The majority of the sites were established in the eighth century, that is a little before what we reckon to be the Viking period in the usual terminology. And hence, with our strict requirements for continuity, there is still a gap between this time and that of the older villages, even though it is now only a span of one hundred years or slightly more. Nevertheless such a span does cover three to four generations, if we are to think historically in prehistory.

Therefore I shall return to Vorbasse, which at present offers the best hope of solving the problem. Until now I have mentioned only the three large villages of the fourth to sixth centuries. Apart from a single farm of the Late Bronze Age, settlement started here late in the first century BC, but only in the form of a couple of farms. In the following centuries it can be traced through several increasingly larger villages that touch the fourth century. Jumping forward in time we come to two widely spreading settlements, dating from the Early and the Late Viking era, respectively. These lie partly on top of the older sites, and both contain very large farm complexes, each comprising up to ten or more buildings enclosed by their fences. In most cases there is a centrally located, specially superior, main building with large livestock sheds and work buildings set a suitable distance

away, frequently against the fence. In the first report some of these complexes were considered to be the farms of rich families, but the new excavations revealed that each settlement actually consisted of seven almost equally large complexes, to be interpreted rather as ordinary farmsteads, but of a much larger and richer type than ever encountered before (Fig. 11). As I said, the Viking era is beyond the scope of this lecture, but I must mention it if I am to finish by discussing the problem of continuity reaching back to the villages of the sixth and seventh centuries. The area studied most recently at Vorbasse lies a little north of the other sites and may be relevant to our question. Here too were seven large fenced farms making up a village. They belong to either the seventh or the eighth century, but the excavated material has not yet been studied, and the pottery from this

FIG. 11. A complete Viking Age village (eighth and ninth centuries AD) at Vorbasse. Seven farms lie on both sides of an old road. The main buildings are shown in *black* (in two cases they are rebuilt). (Hvass, 1986)

period is at present far more difficult to identify than, for example, that of the Early Iron Age. The longhouses of the northern area bear a resemblance both to Early Viking buildings and to the older ones of the sixth century. If this northern area should produce evidence of continuity throughout the entire Iron Age, then we shall have to recognize that, at some time around the year 700, there was a sharp reduction in the number of farms in the village, but that this was offset by an increase in the size of the individual units.

All the phases of the Vorbasse village, including the present-day village (Hvass, 1982, p. 194), can be traced back at least from the Middle Ages. Is there or is there not continuity lasting two thousand years? This question still remains unanswered, but one has to accept the idea that there were more frequent and crucial removals during the greater part of the Iron Age than imagined earlier. Nevertheless the inhabitants used the same occupation area, however great or small, throughout the whole of this period.

Why have I laid such weight on the question of continuity? When dealing with an archaeological subject, if one wishes to provide a few glimpses of golden treasure or episodes from daily life, continuity plays no part at all. But it is a different matter if one wishes to attempt to write about culture history through the centuries. Continuity of the settlement denotes economic stability for society at that time, and gradual growth in the area covered by structures, or in the livestock numbers, shows occupational progress that may affect social conditions. In contrast, a possible paucity of finds and discontinuity, particularly as seen in Jutland, have tempted scholars to produce complicated theories of a breakdown in economy and occupation; indeed, as a consequence, ideas of large-scale emigration have been put forward on several occasions. In our district in Jutland three separate eras have been pin-pointed in this respect: the Late Bronze Age, the middle part of the Pre-Roman Iron Age, and the Migration period. Such ideas seem no longer applicable.

In this brief survey of settlement, and especially of the development of the village through almost two millenia of Danish prehistory, I have attempted to describe some of the results produced by archaeology in the last twenty-five years. Have we succeeded in solving the problems facing the earlier generation of scholars? I don't really think so. The rich and often startling finds that are now available to research have, on many counts, changed the whole complex of problems, but in reality

they confront us with an even greater number of new and open questions than before.

Acknowledgements

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