

Danish Archaeology in the 1980's

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Introduction

Within any discipline periods of change alternate with periods of stability. In Danish archaeology the last 2 to 3 generations have seen a long period of consolidated research with little need to question either the basic premises of research or the future goals of archaeology as they were commonly, and implicitly, agreed upon. The last 10 to 15 years, however, have witnessed rather drastic changes in the archaeological environment, making a general debate on research policies urgent (e.g. Kristiansen 1978, Thrane 1982).

The first phase in this, from the late 'sixties to the mid or late 'seventies, was the pioneer phase. However, if one analyses the official archaeological publications and periodicals, this will not be at all apparent. They were still dominated by find publications and chronological studies (see Fig. 1). One has to look at the periodical of Nordic Archaeological Students Kontaktstencil, which, during the same period issued 10 to 12 volumes of theoretical debate. This situation represented not only a senior/junior dichotomy, but also the separation between the major archaeological institutions in Denmark at that time: universities, ancient monument administrations and museums.

Meanwhile, for museums this was also a pioneer phase, the most expansive in their history owing to new museum legislation in 1958 and 1977. Most regional museums acquired professional staff for the first time, exhibitions were restructured, and new museums were built. Debates about the role of museums in society flourished (e.g. Witt 1977), and the general preoccupation was with new exhibitions. The only museum to continue the 'long sleep' was the National Museum. It should be noted, however, that most archaeologists getting jobs throughout this period had been trained according to the old university traditions, with cultures and chronologies as the major objectives. It is also typical that archaeologists at regional museums were scarcely represented in the official periodicals, although during the seventies they soon outnumbered the central institutions (Fig. 2).

For the Ancient Monument Administration (Fortidsminde Forvaltningen), however, this was a period of very slow expansion, although the new Conservation of Nature Act (1969) opened up possibilities for the first time of financing rescue excavations. As a result, a new ancient monument department was founded in 1970 under the Keeper of National Antiquities, and from 1975 under the National Agency for the Protection of Nature, Monuments and Sites. Museums, however,

were too busy with exhibitions to realize the potential of this legal reform, just as they were opposed to the central administration which they believed might threaten their own expansion. To this should be added that the Ancient Monuments Administration at that time was regarded as being of low status, and something about which one need not care too much. Consequently, the administration was rather separated from the general trend of expansion and from new ideas.

As will be apparent, 'separatism' is the most appropriate term for the first phase of restructuring, every sector being busy with their own future. For the general public the only observable change was at the regional museums, whereas popular archaeology continued old traditions of culture history.

The second phase, which might be said to encompass the last five to seven years, reflected the gradual breakdown of separatism and general reorientation at all levels of research. As can be seen from Nordic Archaeological Abstracts, these changes were also observable now in the major periodicals, while chronological studies became less numerous.

Most regional museums initiated various types of settlement projects, thus basing their research on the local area and making a better integration with rescue archaeology possible. With respect to conservation archaeology, a rapid development took place both administratively and economically. Museums were engaging themselves more seriously in rescue administration, a precondition for expansion, and from 1979-80 the economic support for rescue archaeology consequently tripled. The Ancient Monument Administration itself also initiated a stronger co-operation both with regional museums, and the National Museum with respect to new projects (monument and site registration, computer projects, etc.), just as they founded their own periodical in 1977 (Antikvariske Studier 1977). The earlier conflicts were resolved by the founding of a government committee in 1979, which in 1982 recommended that rescue archaeology should be transferred to the Keeper of National Antiquities, thus creating an administrative separation between rescue excavations (museums) and conservation of monuments in situ (nature conservation authorities). This was implemented on January 1st, 1983.

In publication this development was reflected in various ways, for example in new types of publications such as New Directions in Scandinavian Archaeology (Kristiansen and Pafudan Muller 1978), in seminar reports (Thrane 1975), and in a response to the needs of regional museums. From a strategic point of view, it was important that polemics became official (e.g. Kristiansen 1978, Becker 1979 and Jensen 1979), just as traditional chronological research was critically analysed (in Hikuin No. 4, 1978). Also, in popular archaeology the new generation had made its appearance, resulting in a line of books presenting new perspectives on Danish prehistory for the general public.

The final result was neither a rapid nor a profound revolution, but

rather a gradual reorientation within all fields of research: from chronological studies towards settlement and social studies -- that is, a change in research priorities and a very gradual application of new analytical methods. Chronological studies no longer gave a priori scientific justification. Due to this change, a better coordination of research between museums, the Ancient Monuments Administration and universities was developed. This trend, however, deserves to be discussed in more detail in order to delineate the preconditions for its future success.

The present framework: problems and prospects

As a starting point, let us consider the resource-base as reflected in the number of archaeologists and their distribution in museums, universities and in Ancient Monument Administration (Fig.3), as this represents both the potential and limitations of what can be achieved. As can be seen, the most powerful are the regional museums. This implies that any future growth in Danish archaeology demands a co-operation between regional museums and other institutions such as the National Museum, the Ancient Monument Administration and universities. Having said this, the first question to ask is: 'What are the unifying elements?' The answer, in my opinion, is the history of the cultural landscape. This gives a scientific foundation for research priorities in rescue archaeology and for explaining the landscape and monuments to the public. Thus museums, universities and administration must change their priorities towards ecologically orientated settlement studies, a process which is gradually happening. It further implies that the traditional role played by these sectors in research and protection should be reconsidered and proposals for the development of future research should be formulated. Let us, therefore, in the following discussion, consider the implications of such an approach in more detail.

The Ancient Monument Administration must put a high priority on research. The implicit and prevailing assumption that protection and management of monuments can be carried out in isolation has to be refuted. Administration without research priorities, and clear research priorities at that, can too easily become a waste of resources. However, in order to link administrative ends to research goals it is necessary to develop new types of research: to explore and analyze surveying methods, excavation methods, the history of the cultural landscape, and the care and management of monuments. There is a whole sector of applied research that has only started to develop recently (e.g. Cherry, Gamble and Shennan 1978, Schiffer et al. 1978, and Hyenstrand 1981 -- a new serial published since 1980 in Denmark by the Ancient Monument Administration). To support such a development it is important that scientific 'kudos' is also attached to this type of research.

This underlining of research priorities as a guiding principle for conservation or Cultural Resource Management does not mean that administration should be disregarded: quite the opposite. Also, within this field, professionalism is badly needed. The disrespect during the

1960s and 1970s for administrative professionalism was one of the reasons that conservation archaeology did not develop significantly in Denmark until the late 1970s.

At the other end of the scale, popularization and information about the monuments should not be forgotten, as this is a precondition for the future support of archaeology. Professionalism is greatly needed here too. In conclusion, an active and informative Ancient Monument Administration is a necessary prerequisite for maintaining the support of the public, for protecting our archaeological heritage and for integrating museums and universities in rescue archaeology, which represents 80-90% of all excavations in Denmark and thereby determines a major part of our future archaeological data-base.

In museums the trend towards settlement studies should be strengthened because museums thereby create a foundation for linking research to their local area. This implies that they are able to explain the settlement history of their locality in exhibitions rather than repeating the general prehistory of Denmark over and over again, as is still common in many museums. It also implies that archaeologists in regional museums can carry on their research without being dependent on comparative studies and travels, necessary when dealing with chronological and diffusionist studies, although normally impossible. Finally, it creates a basis for research priorities in rescue excavations.

In order to support this development, universities must also change their priorities. At the more general level this should be from objects and cultures as basic objectives to a social system framework, thereby linking research and education to Ancient Monument administration and to museums through landscape and settlement studies. This can be further supported by more actively encouraging research projects and Ph.D. projects to be based at regional and local museums. Such a development is taking place only very gradually. It therefore seems important that the two university departments more consistently and explicitly define their research policy in relation to museums and Ancient Monument administration.

The general research policy which I have sketched above naturally needs support and implementation in several other sectors. One of the most important among these is publication, which will, therefore, now be considered.

Within any discipline, publication should as far as possible transmit a representative sample of research. When basic changes are taking place within a discipline, as has been happening to archaeology in the last 15 years, it is important that the publication structure is adjusted to these changes. This will often demand some restructuring of the publication policy, which mostly takes place gradually and randomly. Very rarely has an analysis of the publication structure been carried out as a basis for the planning and formulation of present and future

needs, which is very unfortunate (but see Lavell 1981).

In Denmark, an analysis carried out some years ago by the author showed some basic discrepancies in publication structure which led to the formulation of a proposal for a future one: for example, this led to the founding of the Journal of Danish Archaeology. The main elements in such a publication structure should be:

1. Catalogues comprising total regional presentations of groups of finds that can be regarded as representative. To this category also belongs full publication of single monuments and sites of extreme importance.
2. Research journals that appear regularly with short articles and notes on new finds, discussions, reviews etc. (e.g. Journal of Danish Archaeology). The objective is to keep the actual and the published knowledge in line and to stimulate discussion as a basis for research priorities. Such journals serve to integrate functions carried out by museums, universities and the Ancient Monument Administration.
3. The traditional comparative studies which have dominated archaeological monographs and journals. With a change of priority from chronological to settlement and social studies such thorough research articles will often serve as a starting point for planning and arranging priorities on the one hand, and for popularization on the other. It is through them that new problems and hypotheses are formulated, which may serve as a device for future research.

Thus the three levels of publication presented here represent different but complementary levels of research: from total (often regional) documentation, through selected presentation and discussion, to general, comparative research.

When we look around Europe, we note that a publication structure, similar to that proposed here, is already in existence in certain places. It is perhaps most developed in northern Germany. It is important to plan future publications as part of an explicit research strategy at both the regional and the national level, thereby integrating the work of the museums, universities and the Ancient Monument Administration. Such an explicit approach also includes a discussion of levels of documentation, techniques of presentation -- subjects that have been badly neglected in archaeology.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have tried to summarize some of the major changes that have taken place in Danish archaeology during the last 15 years. The historical traditions of Scandinavian archaeology are important for understanding the way in which Danish archaeology has responded to these changes (Kristiansen 1978). After the first stage of destruction and break-down there inevitably follows a period of reconstruction. In Scandinavia, with the burden of archaeological history upon our shoulders, such re-evaluations must necessarily be

historical in nature owing to the strong ideological impact archaeology has had on society. It must also include a re-evaluation of the role of archaeology in Scandinavian society (Kristiansen 1981).

Another major concern, especially in Danish archaeology, has been the analysis of the effect of post-depositional factors in order to illuminate the representivity of the major find's groups: burials, settlements and hoards, which occur throughout later prehistory (e.g. Kristiansen 1976). Danish archaeologists have carried out analyses of such data over the period 1805-1975 (Kristiansen in press). This type of historical source criticism is essential in a region where the accumulation of archaeological data has taken place over nearly 200 years under varying conditions. Thus the utilization of this historical data-base, which represents perhaps two-thirds of the available evidence even today, demands an historical, critical evaluation of the representativeness of such data.

A third major re-orientation that has been witnessed is the growth of settlement archaeology and ecologically-inspired research (as described above). Interdisciplinary settlement projects have thus been promoted in all Scandinavian countries throughout the 1970s, and today this is the dominant trend in Danish archaeology.² To this should be added experimental archaeology which, after a pioneer phase during the 1960s and 70s (Coles 1979), is now expanding and will probably achieve increasing importance during the 1980s (e.g. Fischer et al, 1979, Lund 1981, Vemming and Madsen 1983).

The situation in Denmark can be characterized as a mixture of that in central Europe and in Britain. The traditional school is still very strong and most archaeologists still subscribe to its philosophies, with only a small group of pure 'New Archaeologists'. However, the New Archaeology of Denmark is also building on earlier traditions of settlement and ecological studies, and as the data-base is highly representative, it has gradually become acknowledged that we can actually reach an understanding of past societies in social and economic terms. Thus today most Danish archaeologists are implicitly influenced by the 'New Archaeology' in their research priorities, which is reflected in a gradual change taking place at all levels in universities, museums and in the Ancient Monuments Administration. In a few years everybody will probably have forgotten the polemics of the 1970s. The pioneers will state that they introduced and implemented the new trends, and the more traditional archaeologists will claim that they saved it from speculation. Thus it is the combination of a strong data-base and practically-applied or "middle-range" theory that constitute what I regard as a special Danish or Scandinavian element within the general stream of 'New Archaeology'. As the average Danish archaeologist is in his or her mid- to late-thirties, this will probably remain our profile throughout the 1980s -- and perhaps longer.

Notes

1. It should be noted that a precondition for this planned, selective publication structure exists in the central registers of the National Museum containing (in theory) all archaeological information about Denmark, including full excavation reports, normally produced within one year of the completion of the excavations. Thus the central registers serve as a data-base available to researchers. During the 1980s a major part of it -- the Paris survey record of all archaeological sites and find-localities in Denmark -- is to be computerized. Phase 1, the digitising of find maps, has already been completed (Hansen 1982).
2. Recently, Bertha Stjernquist has summarized the Swedish projects (Stjernquist 1979). The Inter-Scandinavian 'Bebyggelsehistorisk Tidsskrift' (Review of Settlement History), which has been issued since 1979 by the Department of Human Geography in Stockholm, stresses the increasing importance of settlement archaeology in Scandinavia. Its potential for contributing for contributing to world archaeology was also recently pointed out by Moberg (1981).

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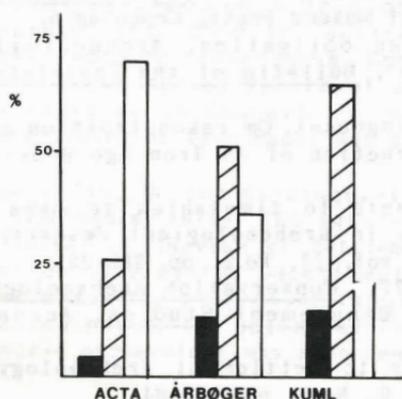


Figure 1

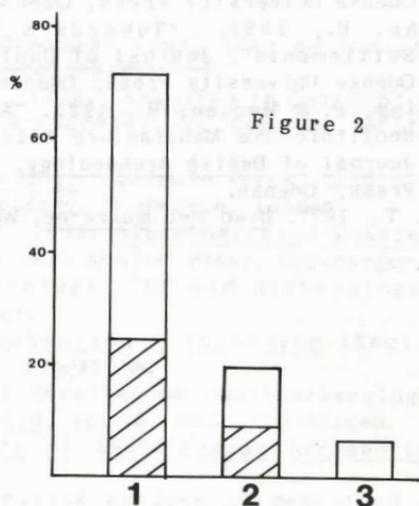


Figure 2

	1965	1970	1976	1982
Universities	4	8	10	9
Nat. Mus.	8	9	9	11
Anc. Mon. Adm.	3	3	4	8
Regional Mus.	6⁽³⁾	11⁽⁵⁾	23⁽⁵⁾	41⁽⁶⁾
Total	21	31	46	69

Figure 3