

The Late Germanic and Viking Period

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The Late Germanic Iron Age and Viking Period bridge prehistory and the Middle Ages, and the Viking Period has a special character for being studied by both prehistorians and medieval archaeologists together with their colleagues in the sciences, runology, numismatics, history and so on.

The Viking Period is both one of the best researched periods in Danish archaeology and the one that enjoys the greatest public interest. The last 25-30 years have seen new results from Danevirke, Jelling and the trelleborg forts, the excavation of a complete village at Vorbasse, major urban excavations, and much more.

Up to a few years ago, the Late Germanic Iron Age in Denmark was rather neglected, while interest in this period in Norway and, above all, Sweden, was much higher because of the relative richness of finds. Finland too is quite well off for material.

Bornholm, however, also has rich finds of this period, especially burials, and through the whole of the Late Iron Age this island has a special position both real and recognized. So too Gotland. Both islands are 'peripheral' in relation to Denmark and Sweden, and both developed special Baltic Sea cultures. These two islands were also annexed to Denmark and Sweden late: in the late Viking Period and early Middle Ages respectively.

In recent years, however, many new finds of the Late Germanic Iron Age have appeared in the rest of Denmark, especially from the 8th century. It is now primarily the 7th century that is obscure, although new results are on their way.

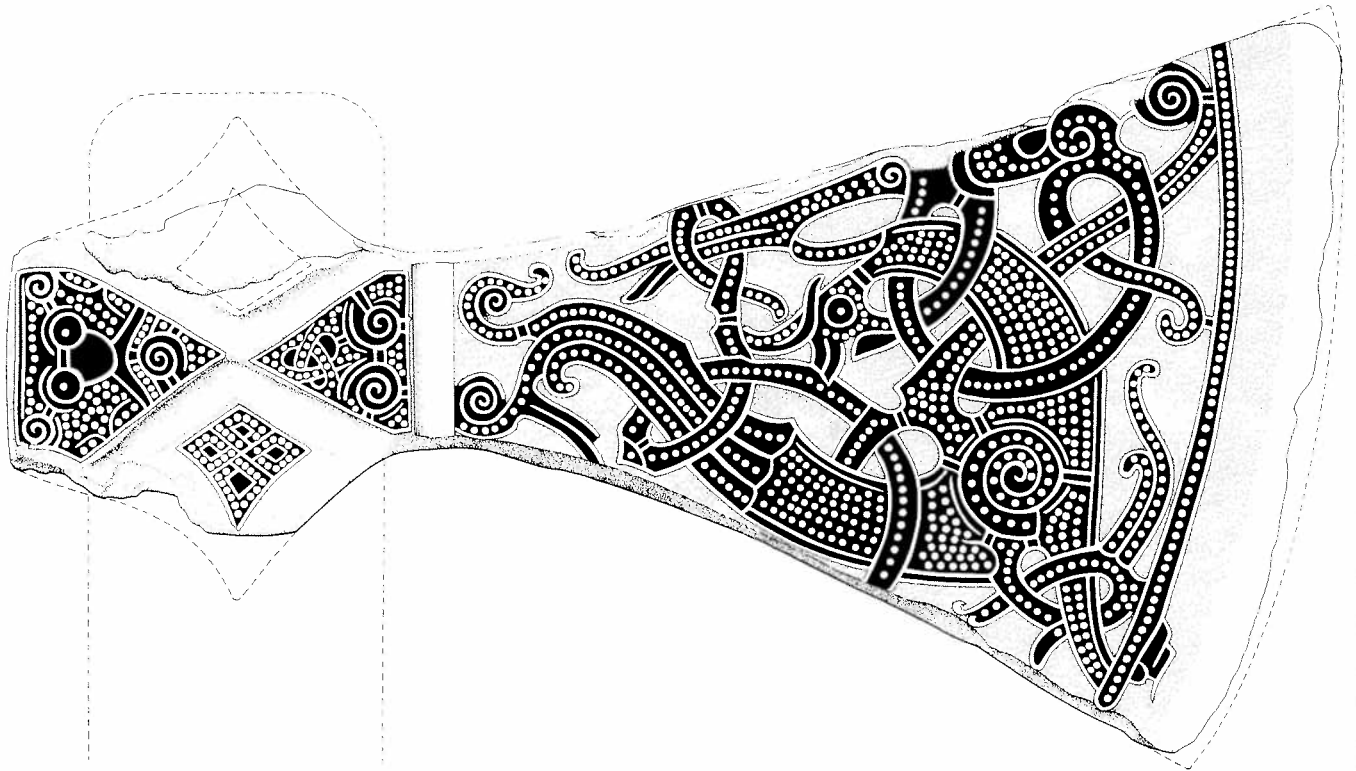
It would be wrong to omit important studies carried out in Skåne and Schleswig, which in the Viking Period were part of the Danish kingdom, from a review of Danish archaeology; they are included below on an equal footing with investigations in Denmark.

An impression of the results of Danish archaeology in the Late Germanic and Viking Periods in the last 25 years can be obtained by comparing Brøndsted (1960a) and A.E. Christensen (1969) with the latest synopses in Hedeager (1988) and Sawyer (1988). For the Viking Period one can also compare Brøndsted (1960b) with Roesdahl (1987a) noting also Roesdahl (1980) and Randsborg (1980). The latter is an exponent of the practices of the Anglo-American new theoretical school, which has also set a mark on the post-1968 period. A fine summary of the comprehensive German work on the

North Sea area (Jankuhn *et al.* (eds) 1984; Kossack *et al.* (eds) 1984) shows the importance of the southern Scandinavian area in the German research tradition. A critical review of the literature on the Late Germanic and Viking Periods of 1976-1986 has been published by Näsman (1991b).

The basis of these good results is primarily new methods and techniques, together with strong public interest and increased international co-operation. Modern methods of excavating whole villages and the impact of metal-detectors and maritime archaeology are described elsewhere. Scientific reconstructions have given insights into ancient technology and raised new questions, at the same time as satisfying a latent popular need to understand the past better. One can mention, for instance, the full-size reconstruction of the Hedeby building at Moesgård, the hall at Fyrkat and several Viking ships (Schmidt 1985, 1992; Crumlin-Pedersen & Vinner (eds) 1986). Craft-techniques have been reconstructed too, e.g. for making oval brooches, glass beads and combs (Brinch Madsen 1984; S. Jensen 1991b:26 ff.; Gam 1992).

Dendrochronology has provided precise dates for the founding or development of several important structures, such as Ribe, Vorbasse, Danevirke, the Jelling mounds, the trelleborg forts, Raving bridge and the Mammen grave. It is especially important that such structures are precisely dated in the Late Germanic and Viking Periods if they are to be located in the history of events and used in syntheses and general interpretations for which there are also written sources. This applies to crucial issues such as economic development, urbanization, state-formation and the introduction and establishment of Christianity. That the founding of Ribe goes back to *ca.* 704-710, and that the site was part of a large new long-distance trading network so early, has, for instance, caused great interest and changed views (Steuer 1987; Näsman 1990; Clark & Ambrosiani 1991; S. Jensen, below). But that the villages took on their Viking-period structure in the 8th century is also an important discovery. These results form a new basis for understanding the Viking raids: there was a surplus in Scandinavia, and the population was already familiar with the outside world. But while the chronology of the early Viking Period has had to be revised in important respects (much that was thought to be 9th-century is 8th-century), the chronology of the 10th and 11th



Reconstruction of an iron axe found in Bjerringhøj at Mammen. The decoration is inlaid silver and has given the Mammen Style its name. The grave and its other contents were published by J.J.A. Worsaae in 1869, the year after it was found. In 1986 the grave was re-excavated and preserved wood was dendrochronologically dated to 970/71. In 1991 both the Mammen grave and the Mammen hoard found in 1871 were published in a monograph with contributions from Danish and foreign specialists (M. Iversen et al. (eds) 1991). The precise dating gives a fixed point for the Mammen Style and a context for a new understanding of the this famous chieftain's grave from the transitional era between paganism and Christianity.

centuries has largely been confirmed by dendrochronology.

The question of when both the Late Germanic and Viking Periods begin and end has been discussed in recent years. The relative chronology of the Late Germanic Iron Age has been modified in crucial ways in relation to Ørsnes's phasing of 1966, and the absolute chronology has been sharpened (Høilund Nielsen 1987; L. Jørgensen 1990). The transition from the Early Germanic Iron Age to the Late is now put at *ca.* 520/530 (Lund Hansen 1992). It is debated whether the transition from the Germanic Iron Age to the Viking Period should be put in the first half of the 8th century. But since there are good archaeological arguments for dating the changeover to *ca.* 760/790 (Høilund Nielsen 1987; C.J. Becker 1990a), we consider it sensible to keep to the traditional "*ca.* 800" when military expansion westwards also began. This agrees both with other disciplines and with international practice. There is no archaeological definition of the end of the

Viking Period, so the historically-determined date of *ca.* 1050 is also observed too.

Steadily growing international co-operation has made possible large exhibitions with objects from many countries, together with catalogues in which selected items can be seen in new and larger contexts and particular problems can be addressed. This has particularly affected the Vikings (Graham-Campbell 1980; Roesdahl *et al.* (eds) 1981; Roesdahl (ed) 1992).

Theoretical approaches of recent years have focussed on the development of complex societies into states (e.g for the Iron Age, Näsman 1988; Hedeager 1990; for the Viking Period, Randsborg 1980), and two publications of the research project 'From Tribe to State in Denmark' have appeared with cross-disciplinary contributions to the study of Danish ethnogenesis and state-formation (Mortensen & Rasmussen (eds) 1988, 1991; cf. also Fabech & Ringtved (eds) 1991).

Danish archaeology operates in a cultural land-

scape in which very few traces of earlier ages' use of the land have escaped damage from the efficient agriculture of more recent times. In the last 25 years, settlement archaeology has concentrated on the fundamental study of building typology and on village settlement patterns. This work has been rewarded with important results which are essential for studies of the agrarian landscape in the Germanic Iron Age and Viking Period to be carried further.

The time is ripe for analyses of the form of production in the Late Iron Age. This requires co-operation with geologists, palaeobotanists and place-name specialists, but it is above all the archaeologist's job to synthesize the varied data. Through new pollen analyses one can trace fairly clearly how the expansion of agrarian settlement that culminated in the early Middle Ages began in the Late Germanic Iron Age (e.g. S.Th. Andersen *et al.* 1988; Aaby 1990; B.E. Berglund (ed.) 1991). In Jutland the settlement pattern also changed at this time. The 'Viking-period village' was established around 700, and amongst other things a new farmstead-structure may be interpreted as reflecting a new agrarian system and the introduction of the mould-board plough, while rye and a shift to two-field rotation were probably introduced in the course of the period. Increased agricultural productivity is a prerequisite of state-formation.

Considerable effort has been put into clarifying the relationship between the settlement pattern and agriculture of the Viking Period and that of the Middle Ages. The dominant model has been one of discontinuity (e.g. Grøngaard Jeppesen 1981; Porsmose 1981). But is this right? The economy of the agrarian landscape seems to have been subject to much greater changes around 200 and 700 A.D. and again in the 14th century. The differences between the Viking Period and Middle Ages should not be exaggerated (cf. Callmer 1986). The theory of discontinuity may be largely the result of the difference between archaeological and historical sources and approaches. The study of the cultural landscape at the transition to the Middle Ages has to be seen in a long-term perspective.

Studies of the social landscape seek to answer questions concerning people's relationships with one another: what was their relationship with the nearest, with their neighbours or with foreigners? What was the significance of closeness or distance?

With the explosive growth of settlement-archaeological data and with a lot of grave finds these are realistic questions, and the testing of methods for analysis of the social landscape has begun, for instance on Bornholm (L. Jørgensen 1990:71 ff.; Watt 1991:101 ff.), around Ribe (S. Jensen 1991a) and in North Jutland (Ringtved 1991:65 ff.). Studies of the religious landscape of Denmark and southern Sweden should also be noted (Fabech 1991b:292 ff.). Studies of this type need extensive and varied data over broad geographical and chronological ranges plus researchers familiar with a wide range of disciplines. Thorough and explicit source-evaluation is also essential. A lot of work is waiting for a reliable methodology to be created, but such research will certainly be worthwhile.

Studies of the political landscape are particularly shaped by the central issue of the spatial organization of power (Näsman 1991d:325 ff.). For a long time the focus of the political landscape has been mid-Viking-period Jelling and the late Viking-period shift of power east to Roskilde and Lund. The dating of Danevirke, the Kanhave canal and the founding of Ribe to the early 8th century has shown that a centralized power existed long before the 10th century, and the age and development of the Danish kingdom is the subject of renewed debate (H.H. Andersen 1986; Sawyer 1988; O. Olsen 1989; Näsman 1991a). The Viking-period defence works also play a critical part in this. These cluster in the middle and second half of the 10th century, with town ramparts, a major extension of Danevirke, and the trelleborg forts.

Important sites have appeared, or changed their appearance, e.g. Stentinget and Bejsebakken in Jutland, Gudme on Fyn, Neble and Lejre on Sjælland, Uppåkra and Vä in Skåne and Sorte Muld on Bornholm (Callmer 1991; T. Christensen 1991; Vang Petersen 1991; Watt 1991). It is notable that these show continuity from the Early Germanic Iron Age or earlier, and that several sites continue into the Early Middle Ages. The Late Germanic Iron-age material is often especially rich, and the importance of this period for the growth of a centralized power structure in Denmark is ready for a radical re-assessment. A closer study of these sites will undoubtedly also mean rewriting the history of the first phase of Danish urbanization. We can already see how the discoveries of the origins of Ribe and the trading site at Åhus have turned traditional

The excavations of the ring forts of Trelleborg, Fyrkat and Aggersborg turned the view of the Viking Period upside down. The full-size reconstructions of one of the halls at Trelleborg in the 1940's and Fyrkat in the 1980's have been of great importance for the presentation of the archaeological discoveries. The Fyrkat hall is illustrated (Schmidt 1985, 1992). Settlement excavations show that similar halls were main buildings on farmsteads over the whole country.



understandings upside down (cf. for instance the title of O. Olsen 1975).

Our knowledge of most 'central places' is still limited, but answers to questions on the ethnogenesis of the Danes and the origins of the Danish state must, *inter alia*, come from analyses of the central places' relationship with their region, with one another, and with communities outside Scandinavia. Several studies are already published (Callmer 1991; Fabech 1991b; L. Jørgensen 1990; Højlund Nielsen 1991; Thrane 1991c; Watt 1991).

Studies of rural settlement and early urbanization have also shed new light on long-distance trade. An established trade in luxuries continues to dominate into the Late Germanic Period, but around 700 the southern Scandinavian area joined the North Sea market in humbler goods. In the Viking Period this trading network was extended far into the Baltic area, and the new political freedom of the Baltic lands will undoubtedly lead to a review of the western Slavs' and the Balts' roles in northern European trade (cf. M. Andersen 1984).

Essential to wideranging connexions in the Late Germanic Iron Age and ever more in the Viking Period were a well-developed communications network and good means of transport. In 1960, really only a couple of ships were known in Denmark (the boat graves at Hedeby and Ladby) but there are now several examples of various types, especially from Skuldelev and Hedeby; a canal (the Kanhave canal on Samsø); a shipyard (Fribrødre river on Falster); and a harbour (Hedeby). We also know the capabilities of the ships (Crumlin-Pedersen, below). In the case of land transport, archaeological devel-

opments have been nearly as dramatic: the embankments and bridges of the period are now well-known features; C 14 dates and dendrochronology have rescued old familiar structures from chronological anonymity, and new ones have been found. Carts have also made a contribution, as yet just as fragments.

Several topics in the Late Germanic and Viking Periods have been the subject of large, comprehensive studies and discussion. Relatively few of these concern cultural-historical questions, especially artefact-based studies. The majority are either publications of particular excavations or structures with associated artefacts or extensive commentaries on one or more particular artefact-types. The Hedeby publications, mostly written by German scholars, are amongst the most important contributions in respect both of artefacts and of human exploitation of fauna and flora (e.g. Steuer 1974; Ulbricht 1978; Behre 1983; W. Janssen 1987). But major publications of the Ribe excavations are in hand (Bencard (ed) 1981, 1984; Bencard *et al.* (eds) 1990, 1991), and publication of later excavations in Ribe and Viborg are expected soon. The classic publication of a Danish town excavation with detailed presentation and discussion of all artefact-groups is Århus Søndervold (H. H. Andersen *et al.* 1971). This made it clear that many artefact-types pertaining to Viking-period daily life survived into the early Middle Ages, and that a major change in this range came first in the 12th century and around 1200 (cf. Roesdahl (ed) 1992). Besides Hedeby and Århus, Lund is the best investigated Danish town of the Viking Period (e.g. Mårtensson (ed) 1976).

The finds from town excavations are rich and varied but normally very fragmentary and often without any proper context. This is even more the case with finds from villages and farmsteads. Grave goods in pagan burials, however, allow one to study whole artefacts, or what remains of them, and to see them in the context that was created for them in the grave (e.g. Skaarup 1976; Roesdahl 1977; L. Jørgensen 1990). There is therefore a large and so far only intermittently exploited body of data for illuminating living conditions and many other culture-historical facets, especially in respect of Viking-period towns and the upper class. But the material is not fully representative. Real towns, with a permanent population, first developed in the course of the period and remained rare for a long time; only in the period *ca.* 900-975 did funerary practice demand rich grave goods (and only for the upper class, of course). Only on Bornholm do we find rich burials more generally throughout the later Iron Age.

Interest in special studies of particular artefact-types has been limited in Danish archaeology, with the exception of textiles and pottery. The newly found textile remains from Hedeby harbour and a shirt from Viborg have provided new evidence on common dress (Hägg 1985; Fentz 1989). The reconstruction of the Mammen costume from *ca.* 970 on the other hand reveals the elegant dress of the higher echelons of society (Munksgaard 1991), while a systematic study of all fragments of textile in archaeological finds has yielded information on, for instance, the different types of textile that were made locally or imported (Bender Jørgensen 1986, 1991, 1992). The involvement of textile studies with central archaeological problems produces totally new perspectives (e.g. Hägg 1991). Major surveys are available of Viking-period pottery (H.H. Andersen *et al.* 1971; H.J. Madsen 1991). In spite of all the modern methods, pottery is still the best basis for dating settlements, and it is therefore very satisfying that the difficult Late Germanic Iron-age pottery is also beginning to fall into place (Siemen (ed) 1989).

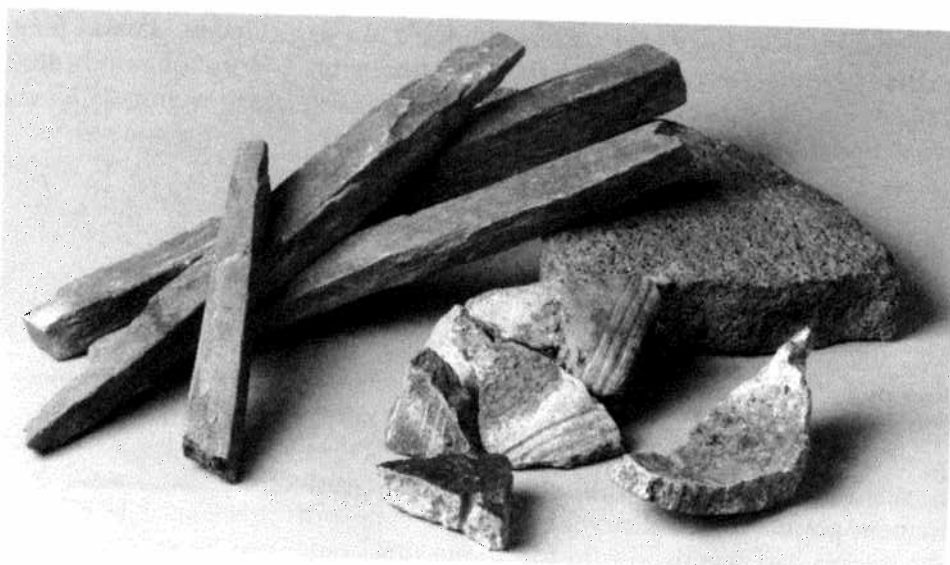
Late Germanic- and Viking-period art is also one of the traditional fields of archaeological study, but academic interest in it has fluctuated greatly in Denmark in recent decades. In 1965 and 1966 two monographs appeared, covering the Viking Period and the Late Germanic Iron Age in southern Scandinavia respectively (Wilson & Klindt-Jensen 1966;

Ørsnes 1966). Ørsnes's work, based heavily on Bornholm finds, stood out on a limb for many years, but eventually his path was followed. Høilund Nielsen has gone further on the basis of more finds from southern and eastern Scandinavia, and with new methods (1991); she also attempts to interpret the social background of this art: the manifestation and distribution of art is treated as dependent on regional power-structures and their development. The dating and classification of Viking-period art styles in Wilson and Klindt-Jensen's work has, conversely, been much discussed. Research on this subject in Denmark has paused for some time, but in Norway and Sweden the topic has been taken up by art historians. The basic classification of 1965 has proved to be practical, and is now refined (e.g. Fuglesang 1980, 1981, 1991, but cf. Karlsson 1983). The chronology of later styles has been confirmed by dendrochronological dating of critical finds from Jelling, Mammen and Hørning. For the early Viking Period, the results of dendrochronological dating of the Oseberg and Gokstad graves will be of fundamental importance.

Graves have always been one of archaeology's most important sources. Many new, and large, cemeteries have been excavated, and some are published: e.g. Stengade, Hesselbjerg, Fyrkat, Bækkegård and Glasergård (H.H. Andersen & Klindt-Jensen 1971; Skaarup 1976; Roesdahl 1977; L. Jørgensen 1990). Some very important finds have been re-studied and republished: Jelling, Ladby, Mammen, Søllested, Trelleborg and the boat-chamber grave at Hedeby (Müller-Wille 1976; K.J. Krogh 1983; H.H. Andersen 1987; Thrane 1987b; Bødtker Petersen & Woller 1989; M. Iversen *et al.* (eds) 1991). As noted above, the richest finds are of the 10th century, the last pagan phase, and interest has widely been focussed on the upper-class graves of this phase, interpreting them in both political-historical and religious terms. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between (Randsborg 1980; Roesdahl 1983, 1992; Müller-Wille 1991; Näsman 1991c). Within the social sphere, the male 'knightly' graves are matched by women's graves in wagon bodies, a burial-type first recognized in the 1960's.

Research into burials is much taken up with the questions of political power-structures and the Conversion. The deceased in the richest graves have been identified as kings and dynasties known from written sources (H.H. Andersen 1986); the only

Fragments of a basalt lava quernstone from Gl. Hviding, slate whetstone bars from the Ribe river and soapstone vessel fragments from Andersminde. Through settlement excavations and investigations of early trading sites and towns, archaeology has painted a new picture of the development of long-distance trade. Superficially uninteresting fragments of querns, whetstones and soapstone vessels have turned out to be important sources for the study of trade in daily goods in the Late Germanic and Viking Periods (S. Jensen 1990).



really convincing case, however, is Jelling. A lurking question is how and when the old cemeteries were abandoned for Christian ones. New excavations have shown that some time after the Conversion it was customary to delimit Christian graveyards with a ditch (Kieffer-Olsen & Engberg 1992). It is not known when churches became common. But it seems clear that after the Conversion, around 965, there was a period of at least a generation with transitional forms. Not until the mid-11th century do we find more uniform Christian observances (Roesdahl 1980:199 ff; Kieffer-Olsen 1990; M. Iversen *et al.* (eds) 1991). On the transition from paganism to Christianity see also Krogh & Olsen, below.

In the last two decades, attention has been focussed on settlement and other topics associated with the economy and social and political development, but much has been studied besides. Archaeology is a broad and free subject and so it should always be. There now seem to be tendencies towards a general new orientation, towards the more cultural-historical issues: a growing interest in archaeological interpretation in psychological and religious historical terms, and greater interest in living conditions, environment, technology and art. These require greater cross-disciplinary co-operation, for it is not enough to glean from other subjects' textbooks. It is equally necessary for the tradition of firm knowledge of the primary data to be maintained and strengthened. A deepening of the sources must underlie bold innovations if these are to be anything more than will-o'-the-wisps.

It is increasingly becoming clear again in Danish archaeology that cross-disciplinary co-operation is often a fruitful approach, and there is a growing recognition that local archaeological finds are profitably studied in a broad geographical context, both Scandinavian and European. The political opening-up of eastern Europe will provide new opportunities, and extensive contacts with this large area, which archaeologists of our generation have known little of, have rapidly been made. Archaeological finds have proliferated in the last 25 years, and happily many of them are sufficiently well-dated and published for other disciplines to make use of it. Historians are now re-assessing written sources in light of archaeological results, which now truly form part of nearly all other disciplines' syntheses of the Viking Period (e.g. Sawyer 1988; Meulengracht Sørensen & Steinsland 1990).

The birth of the Danes and the founding of the Danish kingdom took place in the long period from the Late Roman Period to the High Middle Ages. If only archaeologists, historians and others could come together and study the relevant processes as one! The interdisciplinary milieu is already there in Danish scholarship; it just needs to be made to bear fruit.