
A matter of identity – dealing with a new ”archaeological continuum” in a Danish periphery

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Résumé

Western Jutland is the western most part of Denmark and sparsely populated. The region is a periphery in both geographical and economic terms. A situation, which in relation to the Danish law for rescue archaeology has resulted in limited knowledge from archaeological excavations. The Danish project *An aerial view of the past – Aerial Archaeology in Denmark* [Translated] has since 2008 tried to close the gaps in the ”archaeological continuum” in Western Jutland using remote sensing methods and targeted geophysical or metal detector surveys. These endeavors have resulted in an abundance of new knowledge, and simultaneously brought about new issues concerning future preservation prospects. Danish law does not allow for a protection of the newly discovered prehistoric sites, as no traces are visible in the modern landscape. Leaving rescue excavations as the only ”preservation option”. The heritage sites are thus largely at the mercy of the local landowners and farmers.

The situation is of national relevance, especially in the light of a continual flow of new metal detector finds from previously unknown sites. In response, an initiative with representatives from local museums, Danish universities and the *Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces* has chosen a number of ”super sites” [translated] with the hope of raising funding to protect and investigate these sites. The ”super-site-protection” is to be supplemented by state-of-the-art research, which contradicts the heritage protection perspective to some degree and seem to point towards the same ”excavation-preservation-option” mentioned above – only with a larger budget. Even though the endeavor is laudable, the perspective seems of short term and does not propose an alternative preservation strategy that can deal with the new archaeological situations the ”archaeological continuum” signifies.

In a few decades, the photographic records may well be the only record of past activities in these areas, and for some reason this is not enough to cause politic changes. In addition, ridicule of the non-destructive methodologies by Danish peers does not add to the future prospects. This paper will highlight the issues related to the current state of praxis in a Danish context and visualize the consequences of unnoticed gradual destruction of cultural heritage in a peripheral part of Denmark. The paper will conclude with a discussion of how this situation can influence local and regional heritage related identity formation, and what can and must be done to ensure a long-term protection of a Danish ”archaeological continuum”.

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