

# ØSTERGÅRD: A MEDIEVAL RURAL SETTLEMENT IN SOUTHERN JUTLAND THROUGH TIME, EMPHASIZING THE PERIOD 1000-CA.1200

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## Introduction

Archaeological research into the Danish Middle Ages 11.-15. century have until recently focused on fortifications, monasteries, early towns and the foundation of the earliest market towns. In South Schlesvig - North Germany - the marshland has been the subject of comprehensive investigations. However the exploration of the foundation and earliest settlement of the dwelling mounds until the Viking Age has often overshadowed the Medieval settlement features. North of the German-Danish border the activities have been considerably more sporadic. This must be ascribed to the fact that only within the latest 10-15 years has evidence emerged, which is suitable to illuminate the development of Rural settlement from the Late Viking Age to the Late Middle Ages.

This material did not appear through a real target-oriented research-effort. The finds in question are rather random finds, which have often emerged in connection with large scale excavations of Iron-Age settlements. As examples the following sites can be mentioned: Hjemsted at the tidal coast of South Jutland (*Ethelberg* 1988, 150) and Galsted in Central South Jutland (HAM Jour. nr. 2908, *unpublished*).

Gradually the number of known sites with traces of rural settlement from Early Middle Ages 11.-13. century has grown to 12 in South Jutland, whereas only one is known from South Schlesvig. A number of sites found around Ribe have not been included.

## Østergård - settlement history - dispersed and nucleated

This paper is based on the preliminary results of my ongoing excavation at Østergård (*Sørensen* 1996; 1997; 1998/99), which is situated in the Central South Jutland. So far an area of more than 70.000 square metres with settlement features from four different periods have been excavated. These are:

- 1) Early Bronze Age 1500-1000 B.C.
- 2) Early Iron Age 1.-2. century A.D.
- 3) Later Iron Age 3.-7. century A.D.
- 4) Viking Age/Early Middle Age 11.-13. century.



Fig. 1. Medieval rural settlements in the county of Sønderjylland (South Jutland) 11.- 2/13. century. Del. Jørgen Andersen.

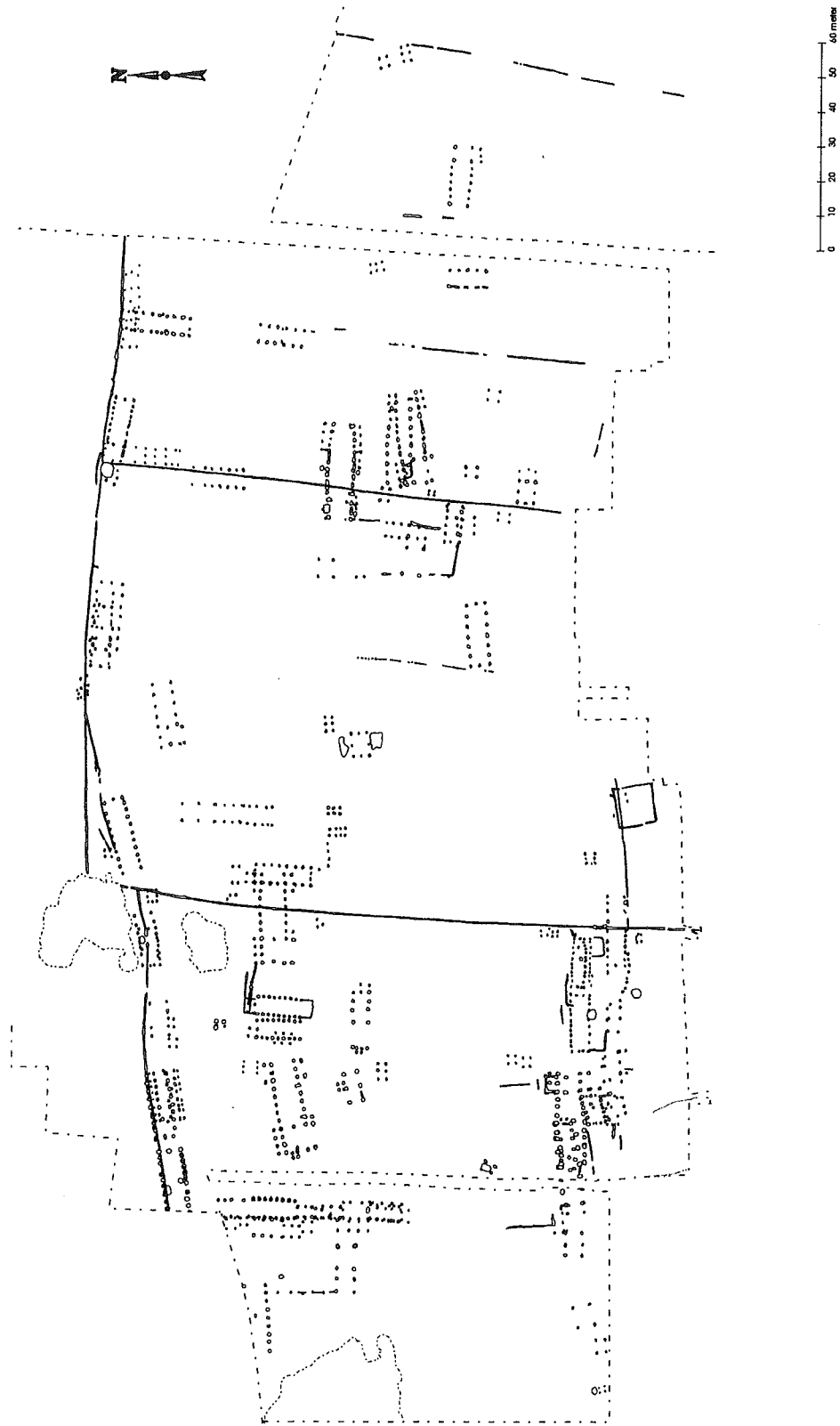


Fig. 2. The medieval settlement-features at Østergård. Del. Hans Peter Jørgensen.

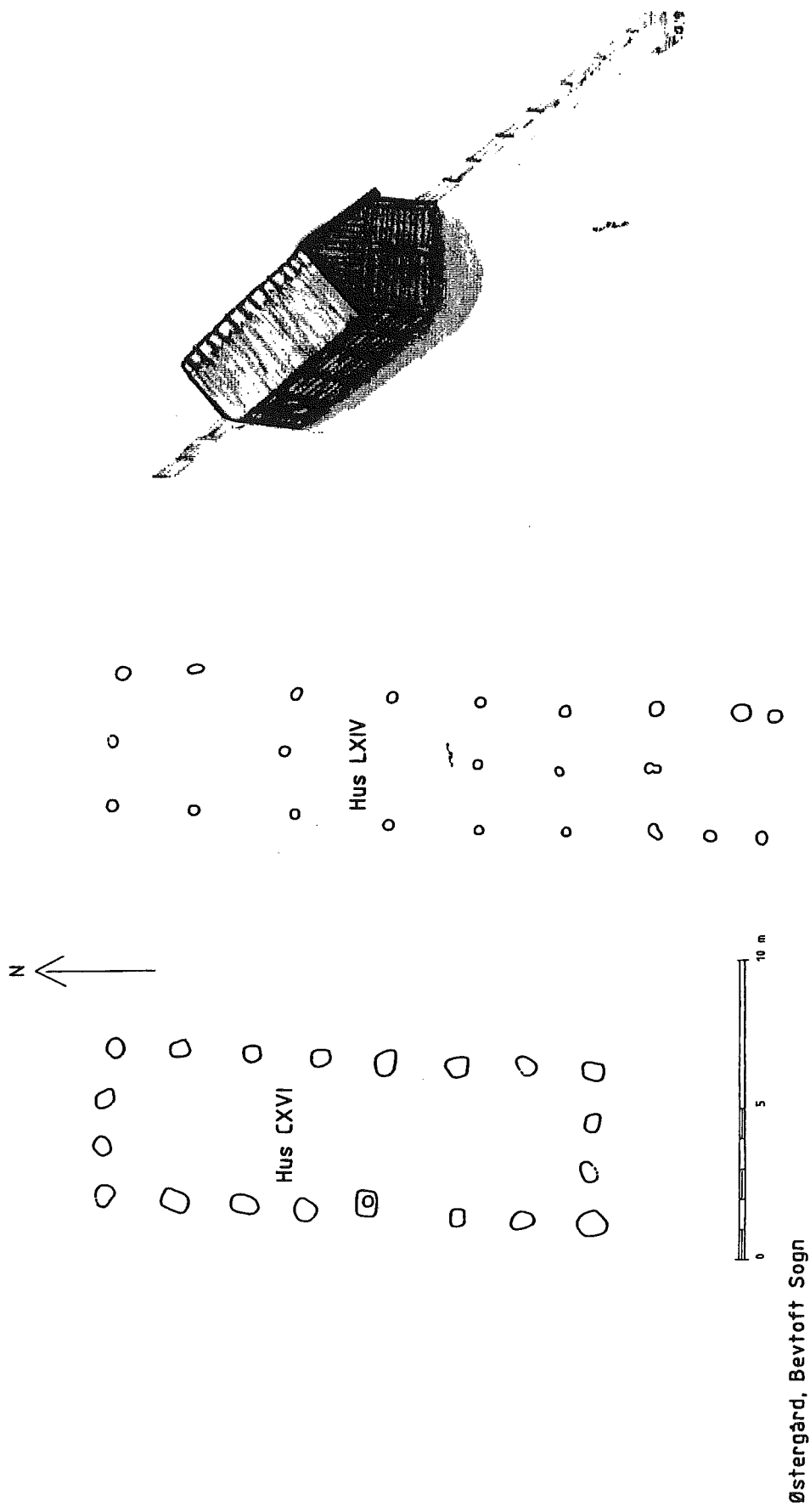
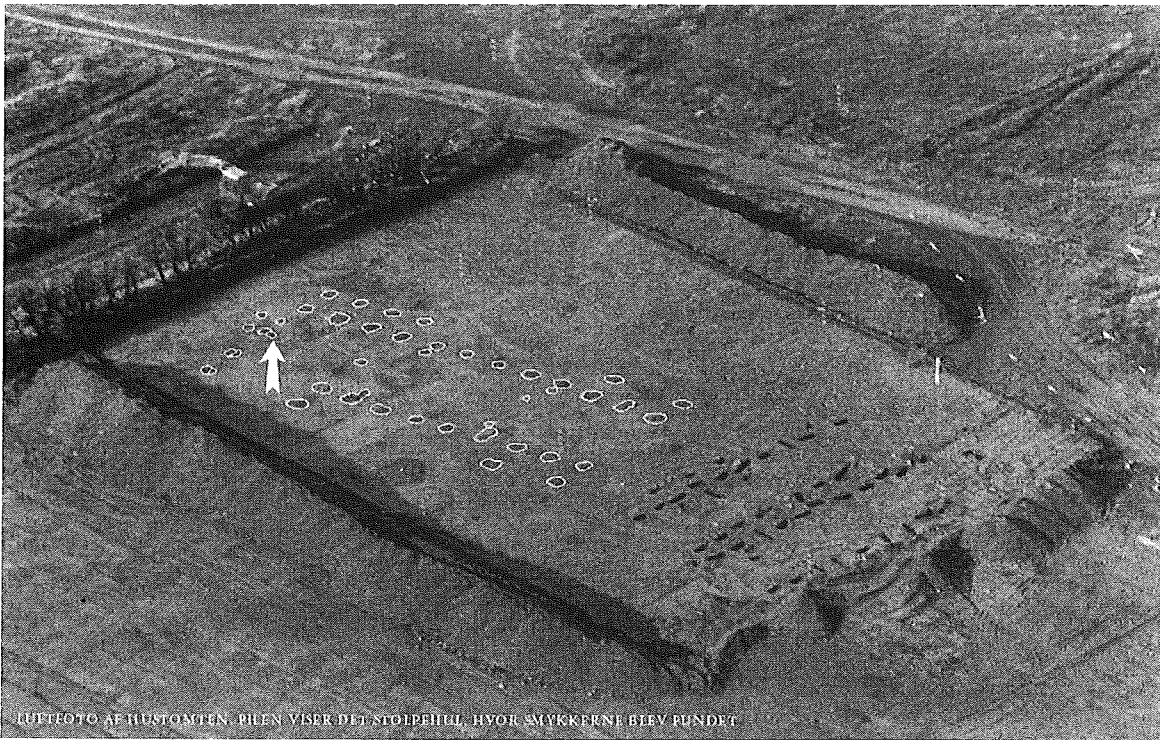


Fig. 3. Houseplans of a single-aisled and a two-aisled house at Østergård. Del. Hans Peter Jørgensen.



*Fig. 4.* Airphotography of a hall-house at Østergård. The postholes have been accentuated by means of chalk. The house was through partition walls divided into three rooms. A broad opening in the south-wall of the western gable-room may indicate a coach house. Outside the western gable there was a small 4-post building. The treasure was found in the posthole in the middle of the western gable. Photo: Flyvestation Skrydstrup.

The total settlement traces are estimated to cover an area of at least 100.000 sqm. Everything indicates a discontinued settlement sequence - also between the two Iron Age periods.

The investigations are due to forest raising at a 185 hectares belonging to two farms Østergård and Kirkelund. The site is situated at the top and the southslope of a very characteristic hill surrounded by lower, more humid areas with streams.

While the Early Iron Age settlement from the beginning is a small, regular village with separately fenced farmsteads and a contemporary urnfield. The settlement of the Later Iron Age seems to start as a single farmstead, which is founded in the middle of 3. century A.D.

Though the traces of the founding farm has not yet been separated, this assumption is supported by three small cemeteries. These consist of a couple of adult graves together with a varying number of infant graves and could be characterised as family cemeteries. One of these can be dated to the last half of C1b, whereas the other two can be dated to C2. Therefore it could be assumed, that the settlement at the end of C1b is one single farm. During C2 another farm emerges. Not until the closing phase of the Younger Roman Iron Age or at the beginning of the Migration Period does the settlement develop into a regular village with at least four contemporary farms, since the majority of the excavated houses and farmsteads can be dated to this time. The same course of development - as described here - is known from the previously mentioned Hjemsted settlement.

## *From Viking-Age single farm to Medieval village*

In this forum however the youngest settlement from the Late Viking and Early Middle Age 11.-13. century is of the greatest interest. It is beyond comparison the largest and best preserved rural settlement as yet known in South Jutland from this period. As the excavations have not yet been finished and the results not yet analysed, this presentation must be considered preliminary.

In the Late Viking Age - first half of the 11. century - a new settlement is founded. A large single farm, of which we can at present separate the main building - a trelleborg-house (*Sørensen 1996, 82*) - together with four pithuts functioning as workshops. Evidently the farm was not fenced. Possibly it has been unnecessary to demonstrate the boundaries of the farm, since there were no neighbouring ones.

The settlement continues into the Early Middle Age second half of the 11. century, where it during the following generations becomes a real village. After another couple of generations the village is deserted. What happens thereafter is not quite clear. Possibly it is moved one kilometer to the southwest to the present village Hyrup. Which is the only known village situated within the natural resource-area. Still we lack a confirmation of this, as the oldest known archaeological date up to now of this village is about 1300-1400. Whereas the termination of the Østergård settlement should perhaps be dated as early as about 1200.

### *House types*

In contrast to the previous periods, where the three-aisled house type was totally predominating, several new house-constructions are introduced at the beginning of the Middle Ages. Thus both single-aisled, two-aisled and three-aisled houses are now in common use.

The single-aisled type appears frequently at Østergård. The roof is supported exclusively by the wallposts without any help from inner posts. The two-aisled type is also found at Østergård, but not as frequently as the single-aisled. Here the roof is supported by a row of posts placed in the middle of the house. So far no certain three-aisled houses have been found at Østergård.

Just like in Holland single- and two-aisled houses are found alongside the fences (*Waterbolk - Harsema 1979*), where they served either as barns, stables or perhaps in some cases as workshops. So far two fence-houses have been phosphate-analysed. Although a proper stable has not yet been identified, there was evidently a much higher phosphate-concentration inside these houses, than inside the main building.

A variety of both the single- and two-aisled houses is the house with side-extensions or projecting parts (*uitkoppingen*). A house-construction known from several sites in the Northwest European Area. They are also known from most of South Jutland, but best from Østergård, where so far six have been excavated. The side-extensions are narrow and constructed as shorter or longer rows of posts parallel to the long-walls, often at a distance of 1.5-2.5 metres from the wall. Traces of the posts show, that they were always standing in a vertical position. Consequently they are not slanting roof-supporting posts, as they are known from the older Trelleborg-houses. These are the largest buildings in the farms at Østergård. They are all oriented east-west and placed in the center of the farmstead.

Excavations in Holland as early as in the nineteen-seventies showed, that large, centrally placed, east-west oriented houses should be interpreted as the main buildings of the farms (*Waterbolk - Harsema 1979, 240*).

## A Medieval Hall house

One of the houses with side-extensions - a large east-west oriented main building in one of the village-farms revealed several interesting features illuminating the interior arrangements. The house was through partition walls divided into three rooms. The central room had a fireplace. A broad opening in the south-wall of the western gable-room may indicate a coach house. Outside the western gable there was a small four-post building, which may be interpreted as a staircase-building. Since this house, due to the large dimensions of the timber constructions, may be seen as a two-stories building. This reconstruction is based upon archaeological evidence together with characteristics from the stave churches and iconographical observations from the Bayeux Tapestry (*Rud 1992, 40f*). Similar four-post annexes have been found at houses at Dalem-Flögeln (*Zimmermann 1991, 46*).

The phosphate contents in the subsoil show that the house has been used exclusively for dwelling purposes.

## The treasure

In one posthole of the western gable an exceptional treasure was found, presumably buried there under the house-floor by the owner of the house. Several other examples of treasures found in buildings show that this may have been the normal way of safekeeping valuables in earlier times (*Kromann - Petersen 1985, 203; Thrane 1991, 68; Høilund Nielsen - Petersen 1993, 226f*).

The treasure consists of two brooches. One of them is circular and worked in brilliant gould filigree with enamel inlays and in the middle a large, oval, cabochion-cut rock-crystal. The other one has a rock-crystal of the same type, but considerably larger in a mounting of beautifully interlaced silver filigree.

There are several close parallels to the silver-brooch (*Steen Jensen et al. 1992, 256*), whereas the golden one is unique in a Danish context. The exclusive workmanship and the inlaid rock-crystal and enamel together with details in the work are however known from other European finds. Among these are three treasure-finds from Mainz, discovered at the end of the 19. and the beginning of the 20. century (*Betzler - Schulze-Dörrlamm et al. 1992; Schulze-Dörrlamm 1992a*).

The largest of these treasures is believed to have belonged to Empress Agnes (*Schulze-Dörrlamm 1992*), married to the Salian Emperor Heinrich the III in the year of 1043. This jewellery is believed to have been manufactured about the middle of the 11. century. At least some of the jewellery may have been made by Byzantine or Italian jewellers, who were imported to the imperial court for that purpose (*Schulze-Dörrlamm 1992a, 19; 1992b, 155*). Because of the great similarities to these finds there is hardly any doubt, that the jewellery of the Østergård-treasure is Byzantine or Italian work and made during the same period (*Schulze-Dörrlamm 1992b, 155 a. o.*). It might be tempting to see the treasure as products of the imperial workshops in Mainz or Speyer. Close connections have certainly existed between the Salian empire and the Kingdom of Denmark. Not only were they neighboring countries, but Heinrich the III was also for a short period in 1036-1038 married to the Danish princess Gunhild or Kunigunde, daughter of King Canute the Great. How the treasure came to South Jutland and ended up at Østergård is difficult to explain. The treasure must have been buried some time during the 12. century. Since the house can be dated to this period through a connected fence. As the felling-time of preserved fence stakes could be fixed to the time about the year of 1100, by means of dendro-chronology. The discovery of the treasure sheds new light on the position of the Østergård-settlement in contemporary society. Since it shows a close connection with very influential circles, royal or ecclesiastical.

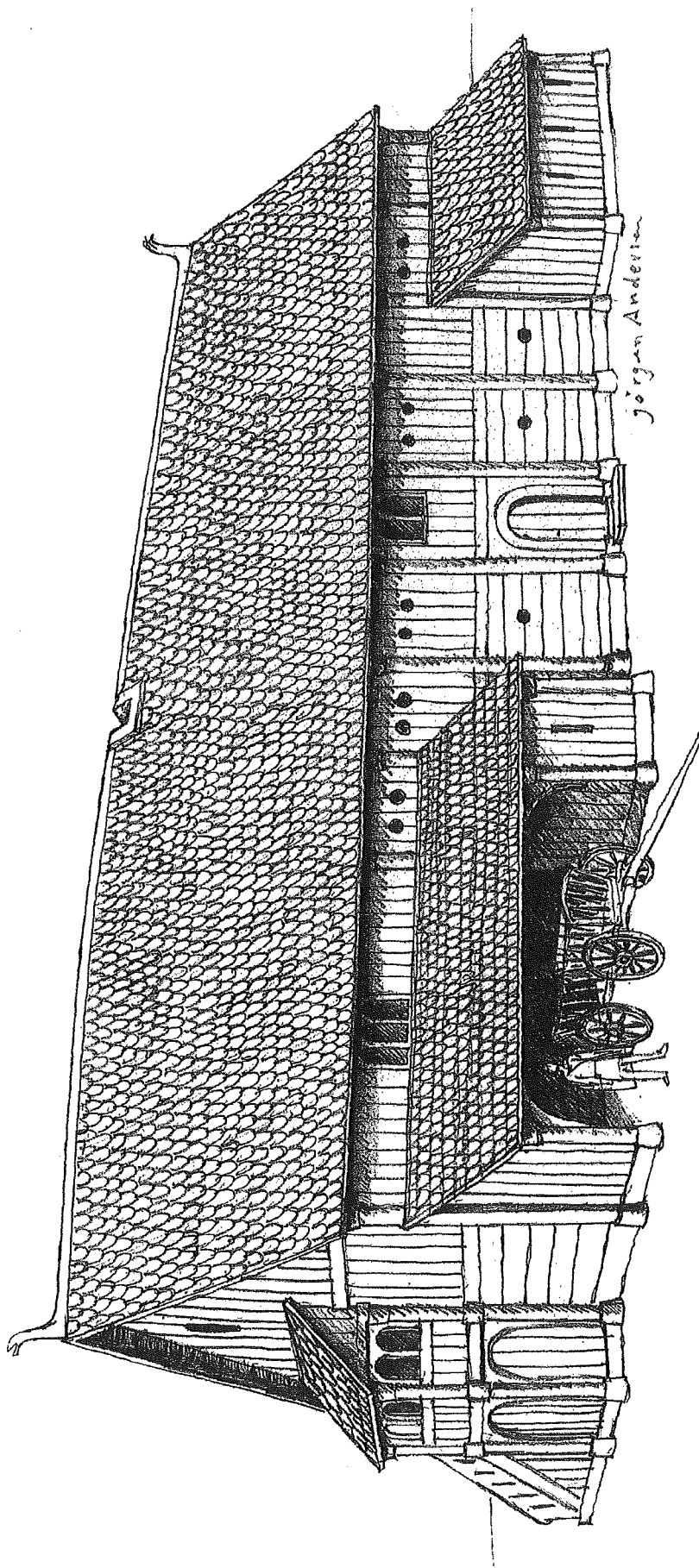


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the hall-house. The small 4-post building at the gable may be interpreted as a staircase-building. Since this house, due to the large dimensions of the timber constructions, may be seen as a two-stories building. This reconstruction is based upon archaeological evidence together with characteristics from the stave churches and iconographical observations from the Bayeux Tapestry. Del. Jørgen Andersen.





Fig. 6. Scenes from the Bayeux-tapestry: Examples of two-stories houses with staircase-buildings at the end of the house.



Fig. 7. A treasure buried at the western gable of a large hall-house. It consists of two brooches, one of gould and one of silver, probably originating from imperial salian workshops on the Rhine. Photodraw. Steen Hendriksen.

## The medieval farmstead

The early Medieval farmstead consisted basically of a main building, one or more economy buildings, functioning as barn, stable, larder and four-post barns or haystacks together with various enclosures like orchards, vegetable gardens, pens and perhaps windbreaks. The lay-out of the farmsteads seem however to vary depending on its character, whether it is a village or a single farm.

In villages the farmyards are separated from each other by palisade-fences. These fences are not stationary units, but are used for regulating the settlement - for instance when it becomes necessary to divide an older farm into smaller lots. Often it is difficult to decide which palisades are contemporary. This problem becomes even bigger, if the fences are only fragmentarily preserved, which is often the case. It may also be problematic to decide which houses are contemporary. As some houses do not show any stratigraphical evidence in connection to fences. They could in principle belong to several different farms. So often one will have to choose between several possibilities when describing the development of the village.

For the present the Viking Age farm may be considered as an unfenced founding-farm. So it is impossible to estimate the size of it.

At the beginning of the Middle Age - second half of the 11. century - this farm is either divided into two or perhaps 3 equally large farms. At this instance however one cannot rule out the possibility of an intermediate phase with an early medieval unfenced single farm. Subsequently the eastern farm may have been divided into two farms each covering an area of about 19.000 sqm. These farms are again divided into three smaller and equally large farms.

Since the excavation of the western part of the settlement is still ongoing, it cannot yet be decided, how the western farm or farms precisely developed. For the same reason this review should be considered as a hypothesis, where the overhead is an attempt to illustrate the possible principle behind the farm-divisions. It has not been decided which houses belong to each phase. Since other scenarios may also be possible, a more detailed interpretation must await the conclusion of the investigation.

The preliminary results from Østergård indicate among other things that in many cases it is possible to distinguish between dispersed and nucleated settlements by the presence or absence of fences around the farmstead. This distinction does however rise some technical problems, since the excavations at Østergård have also shown, that medieval fenced farmsteads can be extremely large. At Østergård for instance these fences can be up to 170 metres long. Furthermore the fences show that buildings belonging to the same farmstead can be placed more than 50 metres apart (*Sørensen 1997, 23*). Consequently the normal length of the trenches used for surveying iron-age settlements will often be insufficient for surveying medieval settlements.

Where farmstead-fences are found, they are just as well-preserved as at many iron age settlements. If there are fences, it will be possible to document them, if the trenches are long enough. At ten of the 13 sites from South Jutland and South Schlesvig no fences have been found.

Unfenced single farmsteads are known from several sites from Late Viking Age both from Østergård (*Sørensen 1998, 25; 1999*) and from Hammelev Nørremark (*Ethelberg 1995, 118*). Thus the dispersed settlement structure of the Middle Ages is no new phenomenon.

Despite the fact that the lay-out of the Østergård settlement has not yet been explained in detail, there is no doubt that it is a village with fenced farmsteads, which in many ways resemble those from the medieval village at Vorbasse (*Hvass 1980*). The two other sites, where fences are documented with certainty are Peerløkke (*Jensen 1989; Orduna 1991*) and Nr. Løgum Church (*HAM Jour. nr. 1919, unpublished*). Whereas Østergård is situated without any direct connection with an existing settlement, the two last-mentioned have been found in connection with villages, which have existed at more or less the same place until today.

Up to the end of Late Middle Ages rural settlement in South Jutland and South Schlesvig can be characterised as both dispersed and nucleated: That is nucleated settlements surrounded by larger or smaller numbers of single farms. Traces of the villages of that time often seem to be found near the villages of our day, whereas the single farms tend to be spread around the villages in the open land. Therefore it is only natural, that the dispersed settlements of the Middle Ages are primarily found in connection with large-scale iron age excavations. Only when a village has been abandoned or moved, as in the case of Østergård, one can be lucky enough to find it in the open land.

ØSTERGÅRD: EINE MITTELALTERLICHE SIEDLUNG  
DURCH ZEIT BESONDERS DIE PERIODE 1000-1200

Archäologische Befunde betr. mittelalterliche, ländliche Siedlungen im Kreis Sønderjylland (Südjylland) sind bis vor kurzem sehr sparsam gewesen. Erst während der jüngsten Jahren sind solche Lokalitäten aufgetaucht, öfters in Zusammenhang mit eisenzeitlichen Siedlungen. Die bedeutendste ist Østergård in der Mitte von Südjylland, wo seit 1995 mehr als 70.000 M<sup>2</sup> Fläche mit Siedlungsspuren aus vier Phasen untersucht worden ist: Ältere Bronzezeit, 1.-2. Jahrh., 3.-7. und 11.-12/13. Jahrh. N. Chr. Der Gesamtumfang der Siedlungsspuren wird auf ungefähr 100.000 M<sup>2</sup> geschätzt. Am wichtigsten ist die mittelalterliche Siedlung, die sich innerhalb weniger Generationen aus einem großen einsam gelegenen Hof in ein Dorf entwickelte. Erhaltene Zaunspuren werden vermutlich eine Ermittlung von Plan und Einteilung der Siedlung ermöglichen. Ganz außerordentlich ist der Fund eines Schatzes, der am Westgiebel eines grossen Wohnhauses vergraben war. Er besteht aus zwei Fibeln - eine goldene und eine silberne - wahrscheinlich Erzeugnisse aus den Werkstätten des salischen Kaiserhofes. Dieser Fund zeugt von grösseren gesellschaftlichen Unterschieden auf dem Lande, als wir uns bisher vorgestellt hatten.

Die bisherigen Ergebnisse scheinen ein Zusammenspiel von Einzelhöfen und Dörfern in der mittelalterlichen, ländlichen Besiedlung Südjutlands zu zeigen.

ØSTERGÅRD: L'HABITAT MÉDIEVAL RURAL  
DANS LE SUD DE JUTLAND À TRAVERS DES SIÈCLES ACCENTUANT LES ANNÉES 1000-1200

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