

SINGLE FARM OR VILLAGE? SETTLEMENT STRUCTURE DURING THE LATE IRON AGE AND VIKING PERIOD

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Settlement development during the Iron Age and Viking Period in present-day Denmark and adjacent areas demonstrates an exceedingly varied picture. There are observed considerable differences but also similarities in house plans - not only between west and east Denmark, but also between the northern and central parts of Jutland and south Jutland. Clear connections are found between the east Danish, the southwest Swedish and the southwest Norwegian material. Regional differences and similarities thus are clearly discernible in the buildings, as well as in the structure of farms and settlements.

The dwelling with associated utility buildings and land is the frame within which the life of the household, the family and the individual unfolds. In this way the form and structure of the settlement give an impression of how people organized their lives, which is of major importance when we attempt to understand the settlement, its organization, and its structure. Great variation is seen in the evidence with regard to the way people have organised themselves both in time and space. There are single farms, there are small settlements comprising 2-3 farms, there are villages with varying numbers of farms, and there are settlements with a special function. The changes in the design of the farms and in the settlement structure reflect the changes which took place in society, i.e. intensification of agriculture, the social and the political organisation.

Through written sources and an extensive map material, Danish settlement history is well documented with respect to the period after the Middle Ages. For the time before it is considerably more difficult to gain an impression of settlement forms and structures. We have today a large archaeological material from this period, ranging from fragments of settlements to extensive, well-preserved and complete villages. On the basis of this it is possible to sketch a picture of settlement development through the Iron Age and Viking Period showing that form and structure varies both in time and space and is manifested in both single farms and villages. The material also shows that the form is not merely governed by landscape and available resources, but must also reflect social pressures.

To discuss the question of "single farm" and "village" it is first necessary to attempt to define these. The farm itself may be considered an independent economic unit. It has in the Iron Age and Viking Period as a rule been surrounded by a fence or dyke, which clearly shows which buildings belong and that the inhabitants have the right to use the enclosed area. The farm can stand apart or in connection with other farms. If it stands by itself, it is interpreted in the prehistoric context as a single farm. If it is found in immediate connection with other farms, the settlement is regarded as a village, the village concept implying some measure of community. This raises, however, several questions:

- what is a single farm?
- what is a village?
- can we be sure that a farm which stands alone is a single farm?
- why do single farms arise?
- is the single farm part of the community in a village?

Single farm and village in the historical context

1) In the historical context, the single farm is defined as an independent economic unit with the same status as an *ejerlav* in danish or we can call it "owners association". It stood alone in the landscape surrounded by its fields and has not participated in a common tillage arrangement with other farms (*Stoklund 1997, 61*). The concept *ejerlav* covers settlements with one or several farms forming an economic entity and thus holding land in common. A unit of this kind may be structured in many different ways: it can consist of a single farm, a village, or two independent named villages (*Fritzboeger 1998, 45*). The concept is not made any simpler by the fact that a village may be structured in various different ways - at the same time and in the same areas.

2) When can we speak of a village? In building-historical research there is general agreement that the settlement must consist of at least three farms in an owners association (*Porsmose 1981, 23; note I.3.4*). This definition is also employed in archaeological research; a village consists of at least three economically independent units (*Becker 1983, 6*). But why? There is no clear explanation, and the definition thus seems arbitrary. I will, however, in the following maintain this definition for practical purposes and operate with the concepts "single farm", "two-farm settlements" and "village".

The definition of a village is not as straightforward as "a settlement consisting of three farms" - the three farms must also be linked. In the prehistoric context, it is simple when the farmsteads are built together or have a common surrounding fence, whereas individually fenced farmsteads lying relatively far apart will often be considered single farms.

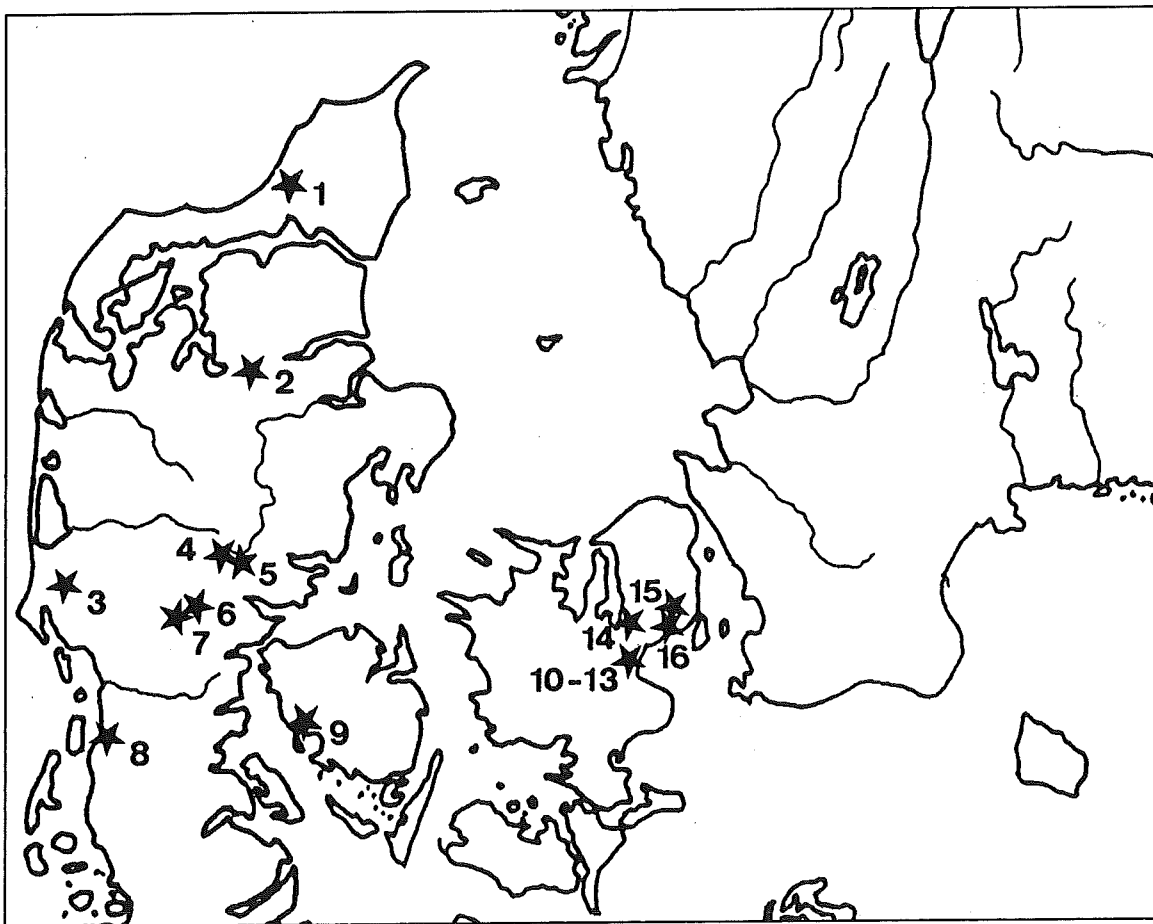


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the localities mentioned in the text: 1 - Stavad, 2 - Foulum, 3 - Hodde, 4 - Nørre Snede, 5 - Tørring, 6 - Mørup, 7 - Vorbasse, 8 - Hjemsted Banke, 9 - Sarup, 10 - Lykkebækgård, 11 - Lykkebækparken, 12 - Karlmosen, 13 - Bellingegård, 14 - Margrethehåb, 15 - Stuvehøj Mark, 16 - Vallensbæk.

To me, it seems that the problem *single farm contra village* boils down to whether land holdings are integrated with one another or whether they stand alone in relation to a farm. The question is, however, whether it is possible to demonstrate such circumstances in the archaeological source material.

Single farm and village in the prehistoric source material

On Öland in Sweden there is a unique source material with reference to investigation of the prehistoric source material: about 2.000 house remains with appurtenant field-walls of stone preserved - still visible in the landscape. Although only a few of these structures have been archaeologically investigated, there are good possibilities for analysing the structure of these settlements. In some localities we find the farms scattered in the landscape up to 140 m apart. Without the many stone fences linking them together, however, they could be perceived as a row of single farms. But the stone walls reveal that they constitute a village with an infield and common cattle droveways (Fallgren 1993).

Such optimal conditions are not found in the Danish source material, when it is a matter of analysing field systems, their distribution and size. On the other hand, in Denmark a large number of excavations have been undertaken revealing well-defined and - delimited farmstead remains and village plans, but without the appurtenant farmland. At several places in Denmark field systems have been preserved in the form of the so-called Celtic fields, which are traditionally dated to the earliest part of the Iron Age, but it is extremely difficult to date them to coeval settlements and thus get an insight into the fields of the individual farmstead/village.

There are, however, a few examples of localities (fig. 1) with a fence pattern that can be interpreted as a manifestation of land apportionment. From Foulum in Jutland (Jensen - Willemoes 1982, 20; fig. 2) from the Late Iron Age (200 AD-750 AD) is an example of a very long fence which may have marked the boundary between the cultivated fields and the grazing-land. Corresponding examples is known from Zealand on the localities Margrethehåb (Christensen 1988, 206) from the Early Iron Age (500 BC-200 AD) and Stuvehøj Mark (Fonnesbech-Sandberg 1991, 20) from the Late Iron Age. In Vallensbæk likewise from the Late Iron Age (Kaul 1985, 119), two sturdy parallel fences have been investigated, which have been interpreted as marking a droveway. These examples show, that we should in future investigations be aware that it is also possible in the Danish source material to distinguish elements that can elucidate these conditions.

Based on the examples above, the definition of a single farm should be other than for the historical period: *A single farm is an independent economic unit which is clearly delimited and isolated from other coeval settlements.* That is to say a farm which did not participate in direct (tillage) community with other farms. The question is, when can a farm be termed an isolated economic entity. Distance to other settlement is hardly a useful parameter, for it will be dependent on i.a. the topography and the type of land, which will again depend on the resources present. This will be apparent from the example below, which shows that fences, are an important factor when prehistoric settlement structure is to be elucidated (fig. 3).

At the Sarup locality in southwest Funen (Andersen 1984), which is dated to the middle of the Pre-Roman Iron Age (3rd-2nd century BC), there are 7 topographically well-delimited farmsteads placed 16-75 m apart. They are presumed to be coeval, but no fences have been preserved to corroborate this or otherwise. Are these farmsteads a series of single farms or a village community?

If the Sarup settlement is compared with the settlement in the oldest phase (around the birth of Christ) at Hodde in southwest Jutland (Hvass 1985, 308), no essential difference can be observed between the settlements. The Hodde village have a large unoccupied areal of 70 x 40 m between the houses. The Sarup settlement have also an unoccupied area between the houses. Note the farmstead furthest to the south at the Hodde site. Without a fence, this could be interpreted as a single farm, but with the fences in place, there is no doubt that all the farmsteads together make up a village. The Sarup settlement could easily have been a (common-) fenced village. It could also have consisted of separate fenced farmsteads. With respect to the settlement structure, where one not only has to define the individual farm unit but also the reciprocal relationships, it is therefore of the greatest importance that the fences are preserved.

This naturally raises a further question, namely whether there "were" any fences. For example the organization of the Bronze Age settlement is difficult to determine, because fences are largely unknown from

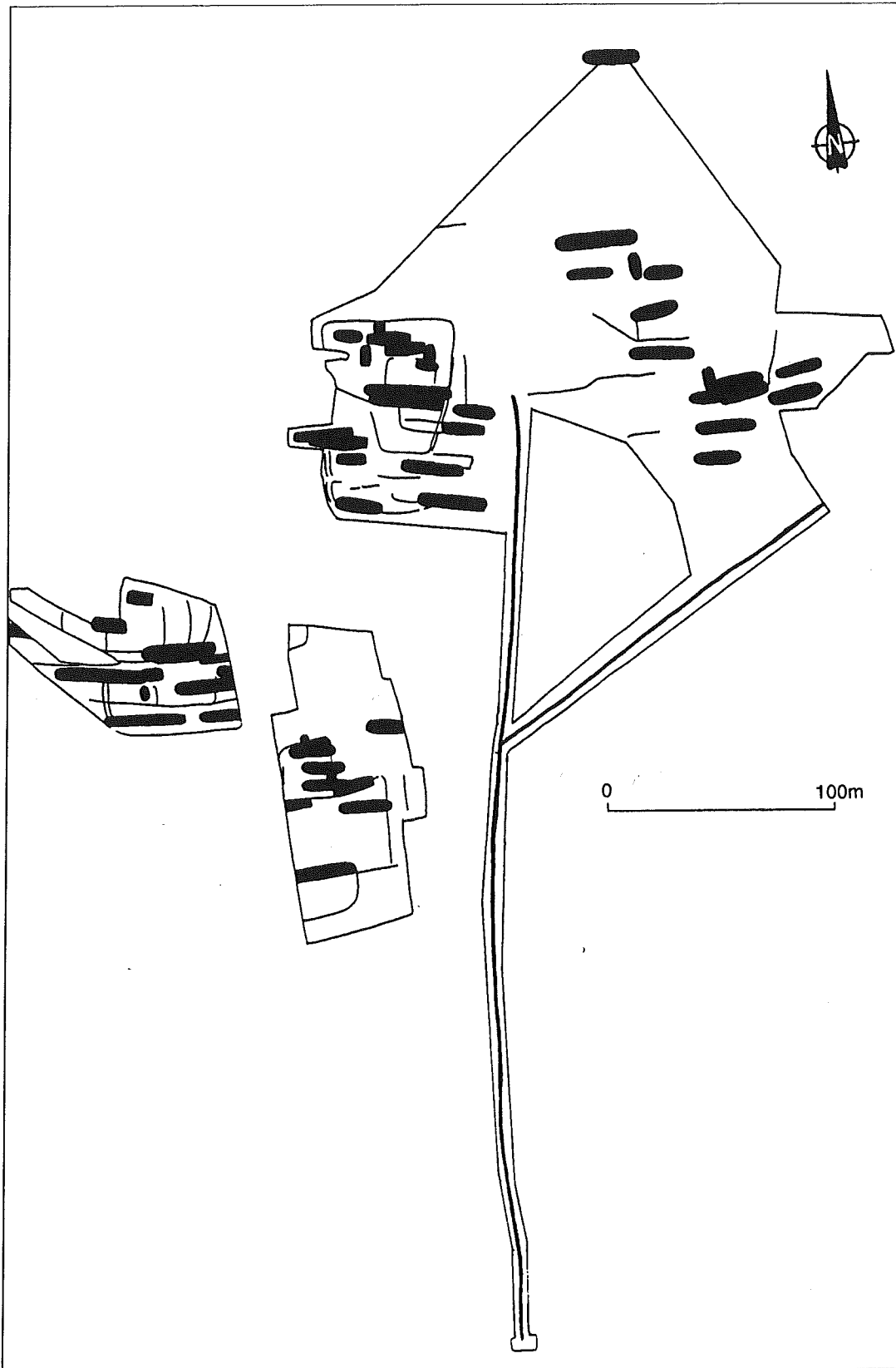


Fig. 2. Foulum, an example on a danish locality with a long fence, which may have marked the boundary between the cultivated fields and the grazing-land. After *Jensen - Willemoes 1982*.

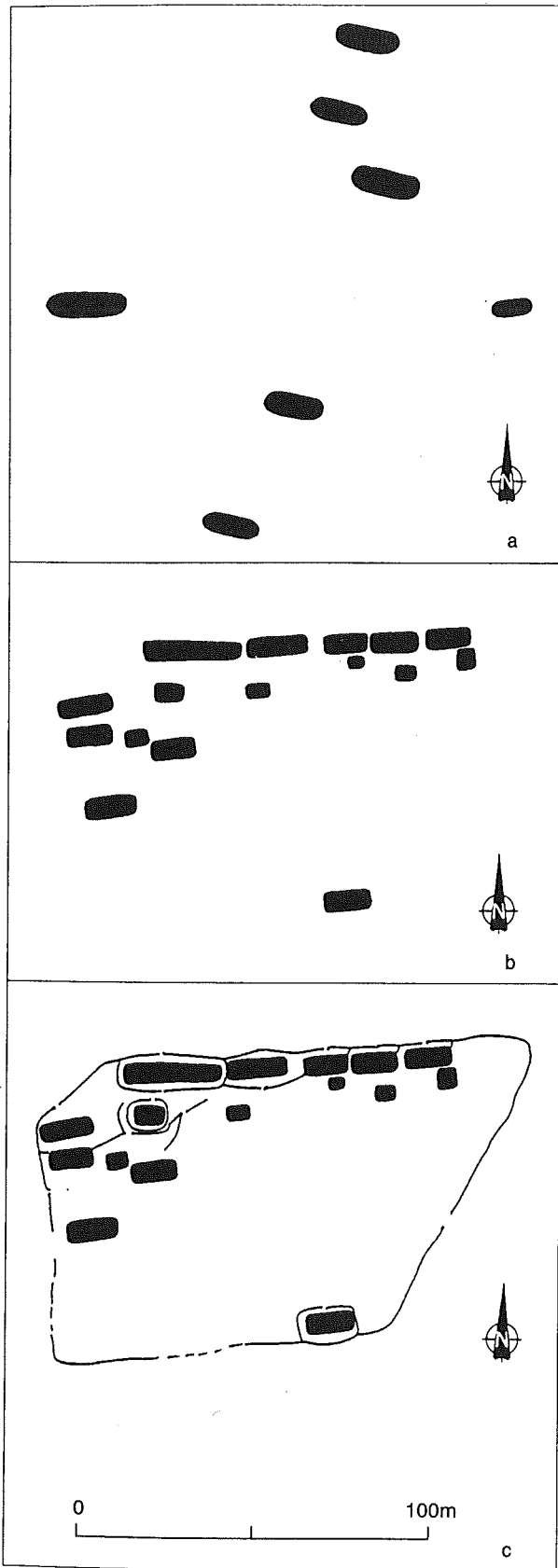


Fig. 3. a - The Sarup site; b - The Hodde site without fences; c - The Hodde site with the fence in place. Sarup after Andersen 1984, Hodde after Hvass 1985.

this period. The farms are scattered, but are assumed to have had some kind of joint organization (*Adamsen - Rasmussen 1993*, 141). It is largely impossible to decide whether missing fences are due to conditions of preservation or are a deliberate choice, which may be an expression of a different kind of husbandry.

Single farm or village?

I will now - on the basis of the above considerations - attempt to elucidate the problem of single farm contra village on the basis of the Danish source material from the Late Iron Age and Viking Period. The analysis is based on 352 localities excavated in the period 1906-1996 (in principle all investigations carried out in this period). Chronologically they cover the period 200-1100 AD, i.e. from the late Iron Age to the Middle Ages.

In the entire Iron Age and Viking Period, the basic elements of a farmstead were always a long-house to which were appended a varying number of small houses. The farm buildings were placed in tofts of varying size and the farmsteads may be separate or built together.

Only 12 of these localities may be regarded as certain single farms, that is to say clearly delimited both topographically and archaeologically. 9 from the Late Iron Age (200-750 AD) and 3 are from the Viking Period (750-1100 AD). This division of the investigation period has been chosen because around 750 AD, there is a marked change in the arrangement of the settlement, by which the structure of both the houses and the farmsteads is changed. We got separate byres, more houses were added, and the enclosed area increased. It is interesting to attempt to illuminate the problem single farm/village in relation to this.

The single farms make up 3,5 % of the material. It is difficult to decide whether this figure is representative, or whether such settlements are under-represented because they have escaped our notice. The dating of the farmsteads is relatively broad, also seen in relation to coeval villages. It is therefore difficult to give a precise picture of the settlement structure in a given area at a given point of time. In order to further elucidate and support the analyses of the single farms, the double farms, which according to the definition are not regarded as villages, will also be included.

In the late Iron Age, there are, as mentioned, 9 single farms: 3 in Zealand and 6 in Jutland (*fig. 4*). In east Zealand, 3 single farms have been excavated: Lykkebækgård, Lykkebækparken and Karlemosen, all dated to the period 3rd to 6th century. Each farmstead consists of a long-house and one or two small houses and is of exactly the same size and form as the farmsteads in a neighbouring village, Bellingegård (*Tornbjerg 1992; 1999*). Each unit is topographically self-contained on a salience surrounded by wet and meadow areas with a distance of 125-300 m (*fig. 5*).

From Jutland, 3 examples will be mentioned, all dated to the 6th-7th century. Two of them lie close to a coeval village. As in the examples from Zealand, there is no difference between the single farms and the village farmsteads with respect to form or area. In Tørring, central Jutland¹, the topography must have been a contributory factor, whereas this cannot have been the case in Vorbasse², where there was enough room and sufficient resources.

The third example is from Mørup i south-central Jutland (*Kaldal Mikkelsen 1987; 1988*) (*fig. 6*). Here there is a very large farmstead, both with respect to buildings and enclosed area. The farmstead is topographically well defined and no coeval village is known in the vicinity. Although there naturally may have been one. The nearest presumably coeval village is 7 km distant. The farmstead stands apart in respect of size, but not of its wealth. The same objects are found as we usually find in settlements: a little pottery, hammer-stones and a couple of quern fragments.

Also from the Late Iron Age, 3 examples of "two-farm" settlements are known, all with farmsteads resembling the average farmstead of this period.

From the Viking period, the material is very sparse, only 3 examples of single farms being known - one from Bornholm, one from Zealand and one from Jutland, all topographically well defined (*fig. 7*).

1 Tørring, j.nr. VKH 1514 Vejle Museum, Tørring sogn, sb. 4, Vejle Amt.

2 Vorbasse, j.nr. VKH A 114/NMI 1124/75. Vorbasse sogn, Ribe Amt.

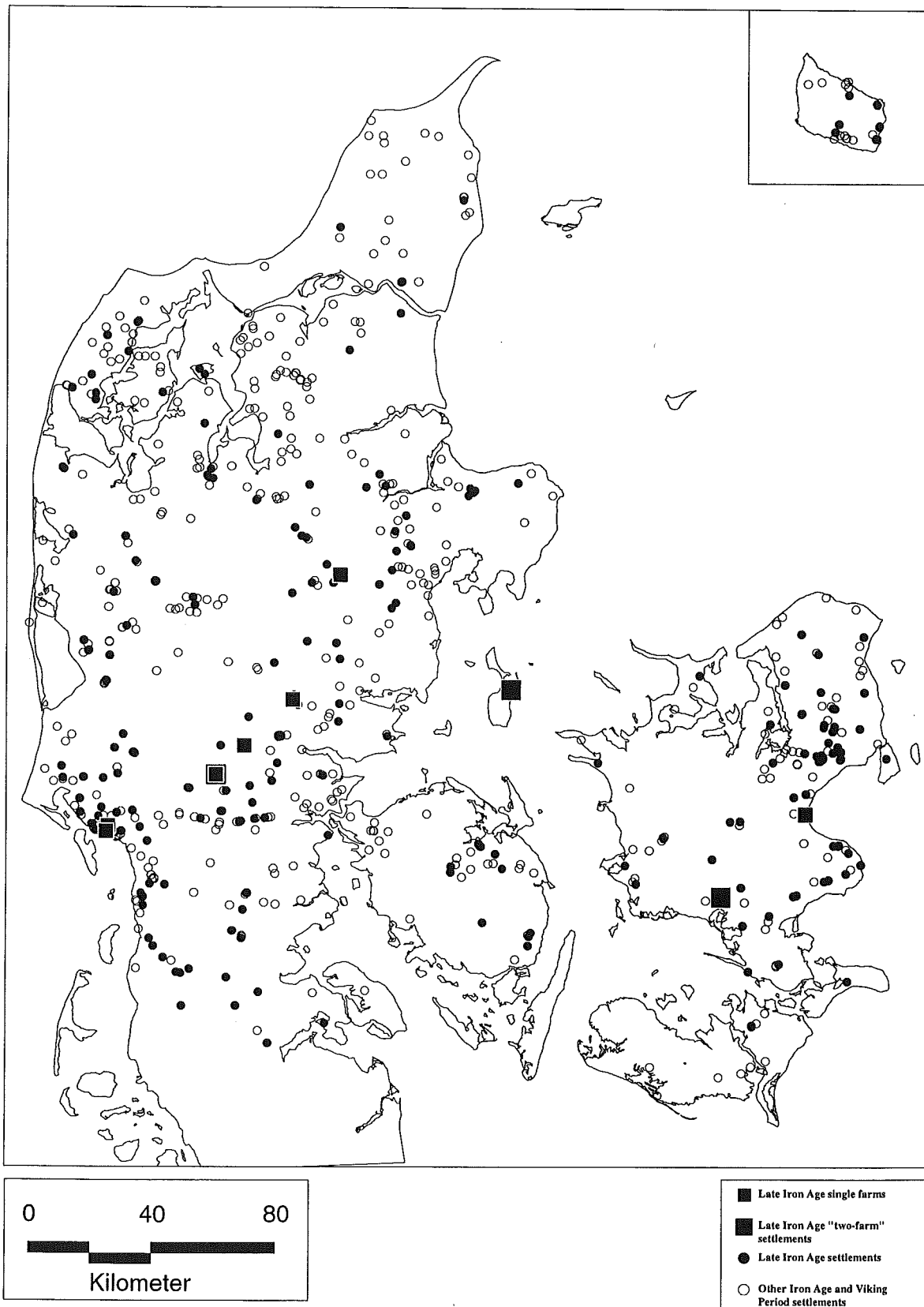


Fig. 4. Distribution of the analysed localities in the Late Iron Age with single farms and "two-farm"-settlements plotted in.

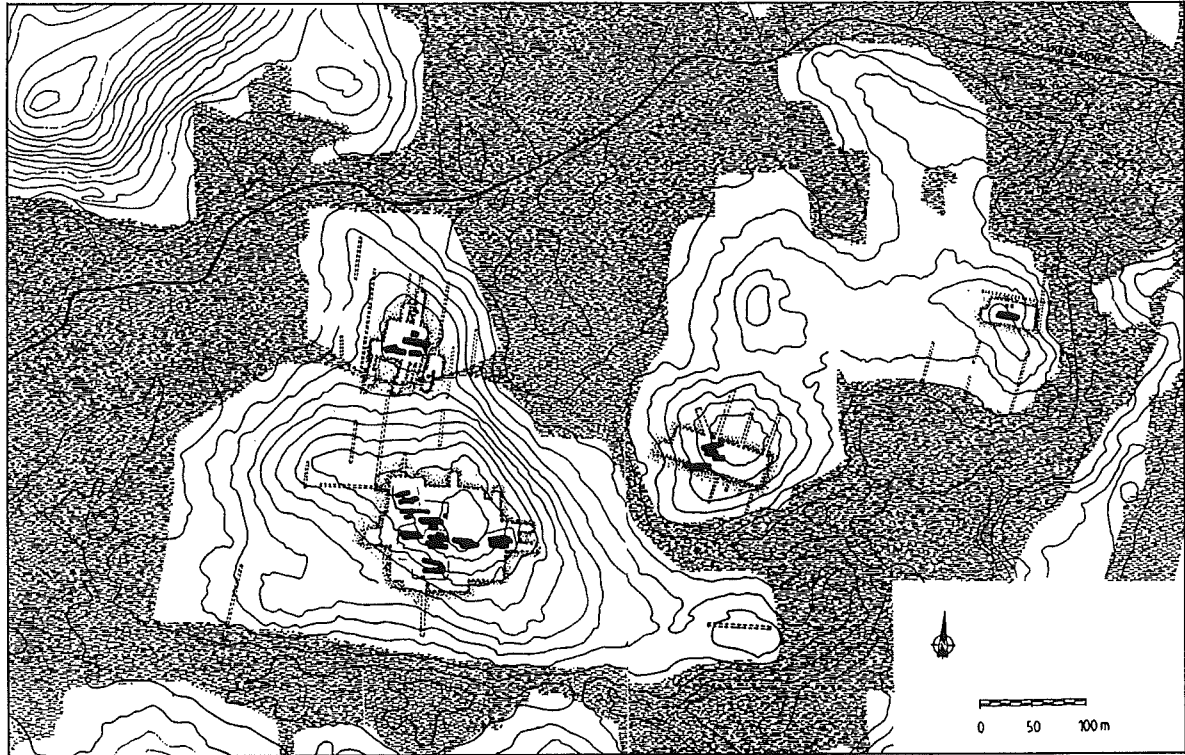


Fig. 5. Survey plan of the village Bellingegård and the 3 single farms Lykkebækgård, Lykkebækparken and Karlemosen in eastern Zealand. 0.5 m equidistance. After *Tornbjerg 1999*.

Why do single farms arise? Is topography the decisive factor?

The topography plays a major role for the form of the settlement, which is seen from the example *fig. 8*. At the Nørre Snede locality in central Jutland, the topography prevents the settlement from expanding, with the result that the farmsteads clump irregularly together (*Hansen 1988*). At Vorbasse in south-central Jutland there is plenty of room, however, and the farmsteads are found together in regular rows (*Hvass 1979*). In Stavad, northern Jutland, the farmsteads lie on small natural elevations in a meadow/bog area 20-80 m apart (*Dehn 1982*). Should we perceive these farmsteads as a row of single farms or do they make up a village?

Another good example is the single farms from eastern Zealand (*fig. 5*). They are all topographically well defined, each on its own eminence surrounded by wet and meadow areas, as in the village in the same locality. The village consists of 5-7 farmsteads of the same size and with the same dating as the single farms. The broad dating framework naturally does not guarantee coevality. It is nevertheless a good contribution to the singlefarm and village discussion. Assuming coevality, we have here an example showing that it is the landscape - and thus practical considerations - that may govern the form of the settlement.

The above examples thus permit us to explain certain single-farm settlements as due to topographic conditions, but there is still a group left which cannot be understood in this manner and for which no explanation is forthcoming

Are the single farms linked to particular resource areas/landscape types? It seems very likely that access to resources must have been a crucial factor for the location and structure of settlement. On the map

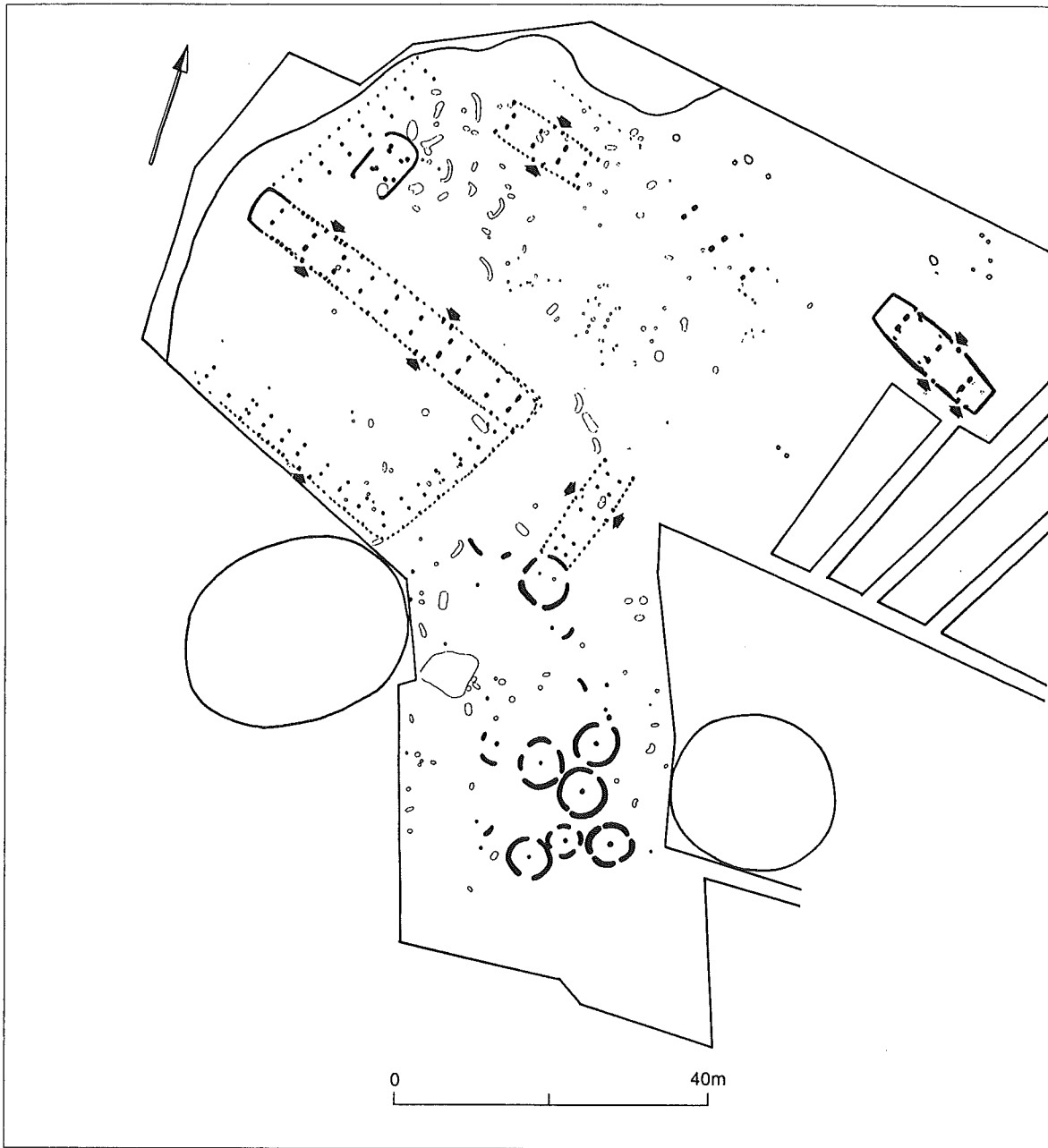


Fig. 6. Mørup. The farm had been placed close to two gravemounds from the Bronze Age and a burial ground from the Pre-Roman Iron Age. After Kaldal Mikkelsen 1988.

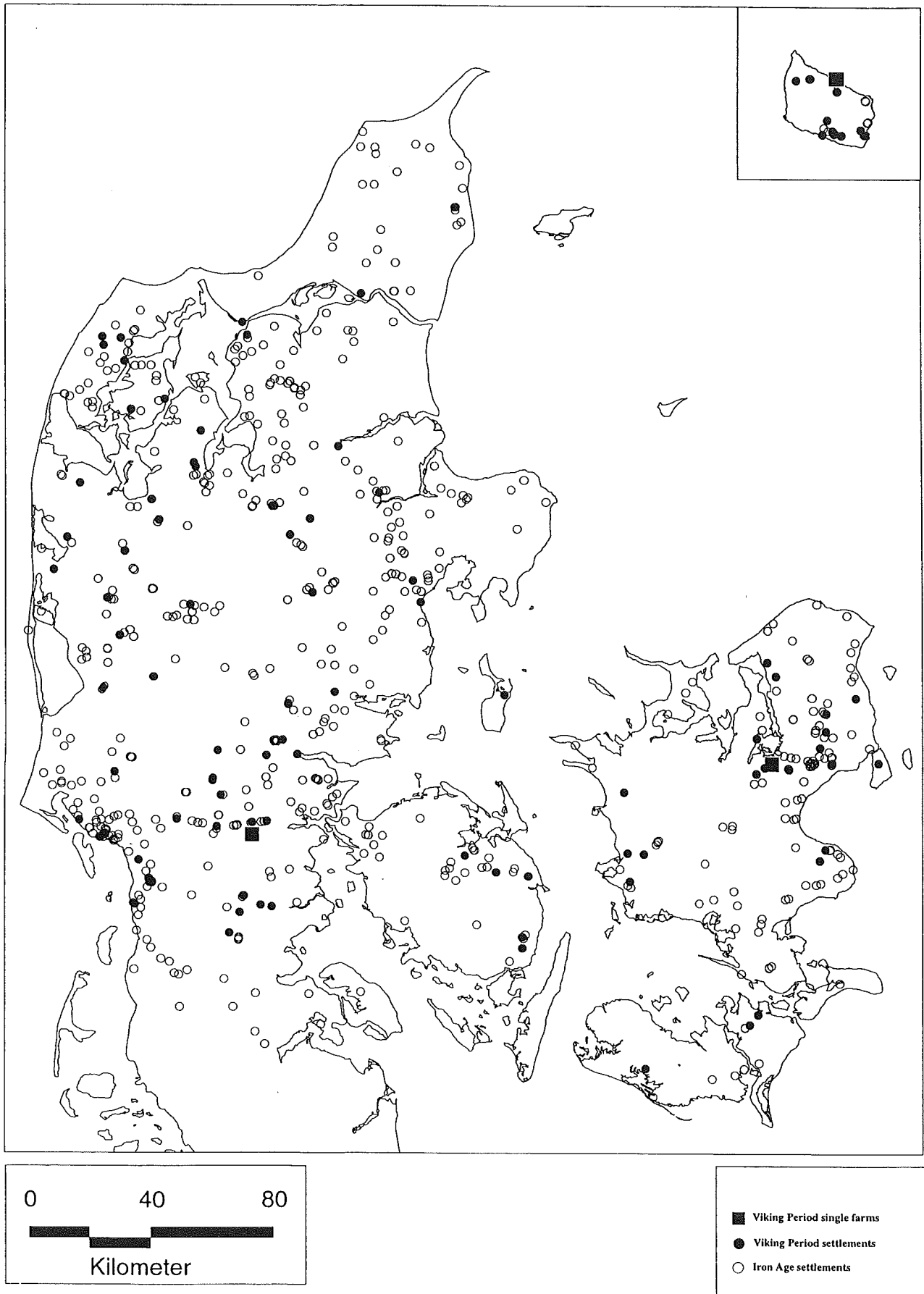


Fig. 7. Distribution of the analysed localities in the Viking period, with single farms plotted in.

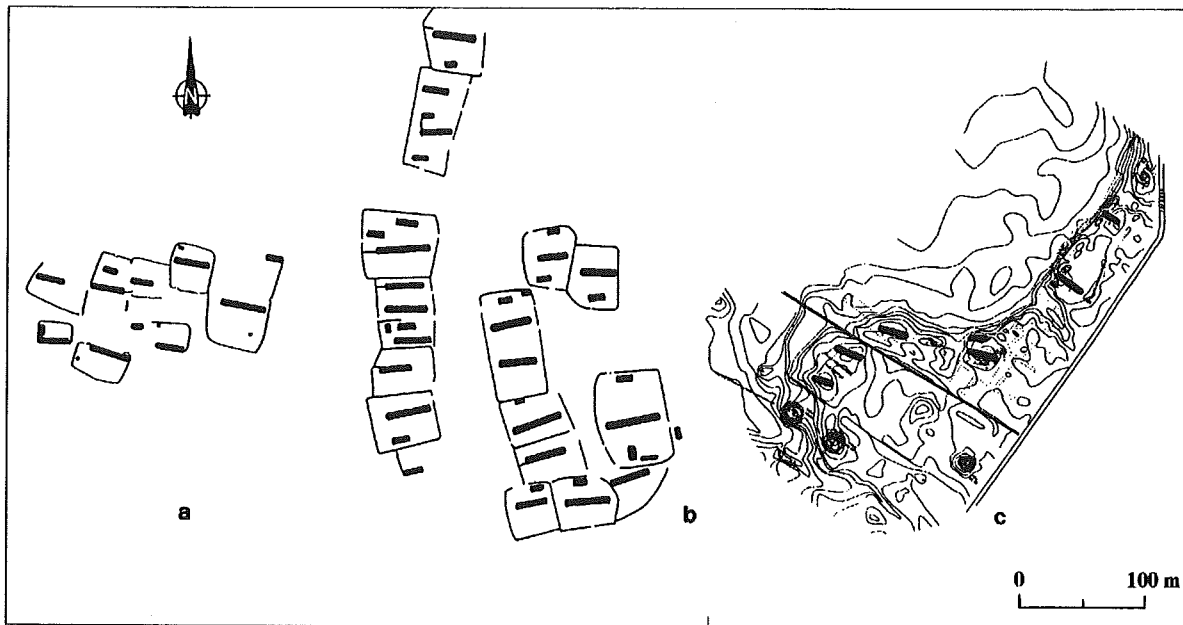


Fig. 8. Examples of the village in Late Iron Age: a - Nørre Snede. After Hansen 1988; b - Vorbasse. After Hvass 1979; c - Stavad. After Dehn 1982.

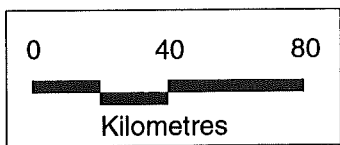
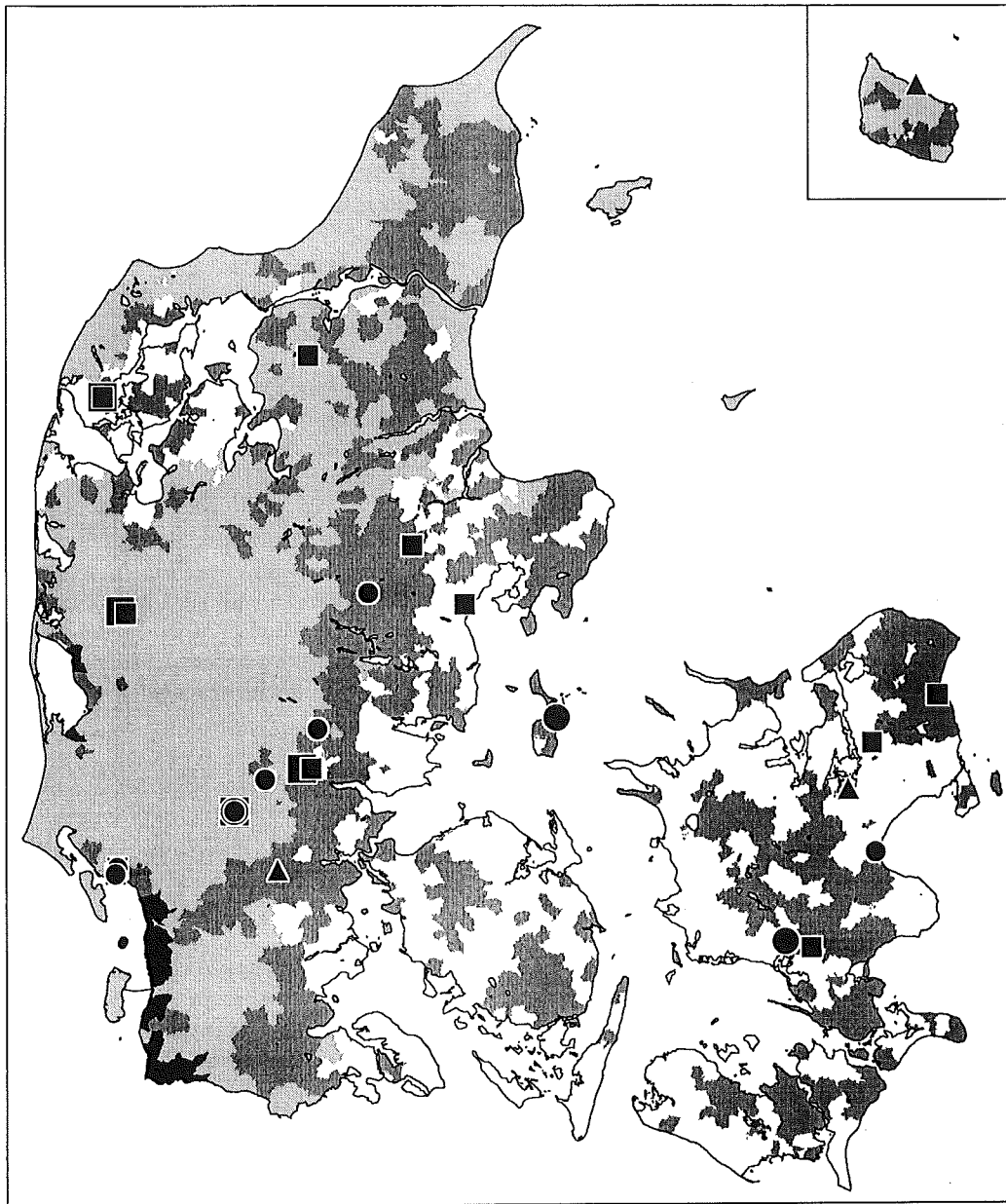
fig. 9, the single- and double-farms of the Iron Age and Viking Period have been plotted with the zone division: arable land, forest, heath and marshland.³ It would seem to appear from the map that it is not "land utilization" that determines the distribution of single farms. There are both single-farm and two-farm settlements in arable, forest and heath zones. However, the number of single- and two-farm settlements is relatively modest seen in relation both to time and space. This means both that a very few new localities can change this picture, and that it is difficult to decide which changes occur in relation to the location of these settlements in the landscape. It is, however, important to determine the geographical distribution from northwest Jutland to Bornholm and that single farms, and two-farm settlements, are found in both the Early and the Late Iron Age and in the Viking Period.

Are single-farms socially determined? The picture is by no means clear. Both large and small farmsteads occur as single farms and as farmsteads in a village. Thus the single farm may be considered both a manifestation of power at the top of the hierarchy and of the "riff-raff" nearest the bottom.

A last question in relation to the appearance of single-farms. *Can the single-farm reveal an incipient village move, where the rest of the farms for some reason have not followed?* At several places it is clearly seen how such a move occurred. For examples in Vorbasse (Hvass 1979) and Hjemsted Banke (Ethelberg 1989), where the farms were positioned and fenced in a way that clearly shows that a new farm was awaited, to be placed beside the last-built. The fact that this explanation in terms of failed re-location is unlikely to have been the case is illustrated by the single farm at Mørup. This is positioned such that its physical limits are determined naturally by its surroundings. There is no room for other farms.

However, most of the above examples show that it is hardly a matter of such an "unsuccessful" move, since they are placed in topographically well-defined spots.

3 The map has been drawn on the basis of information on the distribution of resources in the landscape around 1800 and the 1688-cadastral information on cultivation, fertility and *harkorn* (a Danish measure of production) taxation (Møller - Porsmose 1997). This naturally occasions some source-critical considerations, since the map shows certain historically known circumstances. We do not have the same type of information from the prehistoric time, but several investigations show that the historical information can give us an impression of land utilization in the Iron Age and Viking Period (Aaby 1992; 1994; Fabech - Ringtved 1995).



- Early Iron Age "two-farm" settlements
- Late Iron Age single farm settlements
- Late Iron Age "two-farm" settlements
- ▲ Viking Period single farms

- Land utilization**
- Agricultural zone
 - ▨ Heath zone
 - ▧ Marsh
 - Forest zone

Fig. 9. Single farms and "two-farm" settlements from the Iron Age and Viking Period in Denmark plotted on a map with the zone division: arable land, forest, heath and marshland.

The single farm contra village community

The village appears for the first time in the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Previously, the settlement consisted of more or less scattered farms, but now the common-fenced village where all the farmsteads are surrounded by a single fence with common gates becomes common. Later, every farmstead has its own gate. The next stage is individually fenced farmsteads all still surrounded by a common fence.

In the Early Roman Iron Age, the farmsteads are individually fenced and may stand apart from one another or be built together. This structure is retained through the Late Iron Age and Viking Period, but the area of both the buildings and the fenced enclosure is considerably augmented through these periods. Furthermore, the inner structure of the farmstead is changed.

This development in village structure may be seen as an expression of an ever increasing degree of "property rights", although it is not possible to know precisely what this implies. The communal element could have consisted of a tillage fellowship, a community involving cattle-keeping/grazing areas (although each farmstead had its own byre), implements, the establishment and maintenance of the fences around the village and not least kinship

Single farms are known throughout the period treated here, either as farms corresponding exactly to the farms in coeval villages or as farms which stand apart by virtue of their size and possibly function. The concept "single farm" implies that the farmer cultivates his own land, which is not integrated in other land, independently. But although he functions as an isolated economic unit, he has doubtless participated in other common relations with, for example, the nearest village. These could be social, judicial or political. Finally, he may have participated in common grazing of cattle, a relation which is commonly found in the historical sources.

Conclusion

Single farms have been found from the entire Iron Age and Viking Period, most of them have been short-lived and had only a few, and rarely more than two building phases. This is in distinct contrast to the villages, where the original farmstead is usually seen to have been rebuilt several times - thus showing a considerably longer occupation. What significance this has is difficult to decide on the basis of the source material we have available today. It can mean that the single farms moved more often or that the settlement form was abandoned again relatively quickly. The marked change around 750 AD, which must be seen as part of a change in the method of husbandry, have apparently no influence on the single farm/village problem. There does not seem to be any difference in the reasons for the appearance of single farms in the respective periods.

Judging by the Danish source material currently available to us, there can be several reasons why single farms arise:

Landscape-related:

- the topography and the available resources have played a crucial role for the formation of the settlement
- that is to say purely material factors

Landscape-related:

- where the resource area could no longer meet demand, that is to say new settlers were compelled to cultivate new land.

Social/political:

- where the single farm symbolized status/power or had a special function in relation to society/the other farms in the area.

Social:

- where the single farm was an expression of someone cast out of the community.

In the Prehistoric source material, as in the historical context, great variation is seen in the settlement structure in relation both to time and space. The building is very complex and especially for the archaeological material we have many unknown factors. So the conclusion must be that it is not possible to give clear answers to the question single farm contra village based on archaeological material alone.

*EINZELHOF ODER DORF?
DIE SIEDLUNGSSTRUKTUR WÄHREND DER EISEN- UND WIKINGERZEIT*

*LA FERME ISOLÉ OU UN VILLAGE?
LA STRUCTURE D'HABITAT DE L'AGE DU FER ET DE LA PÉRIODE DES VIKINGS*

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