

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Per Grau Møller, ed. *De kulturhistoriske interesser i landskabet*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Environment and Energy, 1997. 380 pp.

Annette Schou. *Kulturhistorisk inddeling af landskabet*. København: Miljø- og energiministeriet, 1997. 82 pp. ISBN 978-87-7279-090-9.

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In 1981-83 the county (amt) of Funen embarked upon a registration of all the villages of Funen and Langeland aiming at establishing an inventory of those elements, which could be considered worthwhile preservation for posterity. The leader of this work, Dr. Erland Porsmose (curator of Kerteminde museum) is, also, in collaboration with lecturer Per Grau Møller (University of Odense), editor of and contributor to the two volumes under review. The two volumes have been prepared by the forest and nature administration on the initiative of the ministry of environmental affairs, wanting to register the different types of Danish land and on at more modest scale cityscape, widely different inside the borders of 44.000km² (ab.- a third of the Danish part of the Northsea).

One of the key-notions applied is the Danish word, "bygd," rendered, according to the standard dictionary, as "village," "settlement," and "district"—terms which are all misleading in the present context. Instead the review will use the label "unit of landscape and settlement"; after all, this is what the two volumes discuss. Both geographical (geological, morphological etc.) and cultural geographies are included, their connection as well as their interaction. The second volume discusses the latter subject, while the first deals with the former.

Without embarking upon detail, this work represents a fresh and modern approach to an old subject. About 1920 the Danish historian H.V. Clausen tried to map the units of settlement, and eight years later the archaeologist, Vilh. la Cour discussed the early stone age pattern of settlement on Zealand. Finally, in 1942 during the German occupation, the great historian of cultural history Hugo Matthiessen gave a general characterization of 'the old land.'

The first volume does, however, not simply pur new wines on old bottles. Of course, the mass of data,

available, is more complete than seventy years ago, and questions differ, but the main result of the two authors' (Porsmose's and Grau Møller's) inquiry seems to be the close connections between geographical preconditions and types of settlement, the latter being divided into four categories: forest-, plain-/field, heath- and fishing settlements.

The introduction presents the main sources, the cadaster of 1688, and the mapping of the country 1757-1820, initiated by the Royal Society of Copenhagen, thus representing the classical pattern and the situation on the threshold to and during the agrarian reforms, respectively. But apart from this, the procedure has been retrospective throughout. The two authors distinguish between four types of human settlement: estates and homefarms, villages and single farms, cottages and fishing hamlets. The two first are again divided into cattle- and grainproducing areas, in forest- and plain areas, respectively.

The group of cottagers rose considerably between 1500 and 1750, serving mainly as a reservoir of labour for homefarms and peasants. On the other hand one may doubt the seventeenth century topographer, Arent Berntsen's assertion to the effect, that the burden of peasants' labour service was heavy. By 1770, the burden amounted to between 0.8 and 1.6 tønder hartkorn per tenancy (in Jutland and on the islands, respectively). One may also doubt the old assumption—apparently shared by the authors—that largescale farming was cumulative process, culminating in the eighteenth century; in reality it was rather an accordion system, expanding and contracting according to the number of tenants.

Finally, a brief chapter deals with the cities, most of them situated at the bottom of fiords, often under the protection of medieval royal or episcopal castles, and with easy access to sea transport and with rich hinterlands. The text and figures bases themselves i.a. upon a map,

showing, also, the number of inhabitants 1672. This map reveals the brutal disproportion between Copenhagen and the provincial towns, a product of the crown's favourisation of the capital at least since the emergence of the powerstate ab. 1630. Unfortunately, this fact—the evidence of human interference—passes unnoticed; after all, this study aims i.a. at tracing the interplay between human activity and nature.

By contrast sixteen authors share the second volume; prehistory gets its own chapter, but otherwise the early industrialization by the mid-nineteenth century remains the upper border (though it has, also, got its discussion): new forms of settlement turned up; railways, station cities, recreation areas as well modern agricultural technology, fishing methods etc., each of which contributed to the transformation of the landscape. Each of these has been carefully described in accordance with the programme of the ministry.

In the early middle ages (900-1000-1100), villages became stationary, but placed close to and with the same division of property as in the earlier 'wandering' villages, but developed into several types, villages of different forms, generally according to ecological conditions and terrain, hamlets or single farms; in the latter case environment has also played a role, but even cultural traditions. Water- and windmills get their separate discussion, as does roads etc. Finally, Dr. Porsmose devotes a whole chapter to homefarms, both buildings and sizes.

As to the latter the author points out, that late medieval homefarms would have the size of two-three peasant farms, in the eighteenth century, they would average six or seven peasant farms. Two comments: in sum we can assume 3-4% of the realm's peasant farms to have been discontinued during this period (net) and incorporated into the homefarms, far less than in Holstein and Eastelbian areas. And second: a numerical border line between smaller and largescale homefarms cannot be drawn, seeing that all depended upon their functions, labour-intensive grain producers or cattle producers.

Finally, Dr. Porsmose repeats the development, presented as a cumulative process, which as stated above it was not. Second: he seems to attach most importance of the evolution to economic forces, forgetting the reaction of landowners against the crown's extortionate taxation during the period 1630-1720; if anybody destroyed the Danish countryside it was the crown rather than the landowners, as postulated by absolutist mythology.

In sum, on this point Dr. Porsmose's views seem a little old-fashioned. On the other hand, these objections ought not detract anything from the merits of these two volumes, in the second of which each author gives his expert recommendations within his special field. The environmental authorities have got the tools, with which they can safely proceed with greater rationality than so far.

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