

Facts about the empirical basis of the dissertation

A number of sources have been utilised to enable the study, including excavation reports, publications on methods, standardization protocols, and interviews with field archaeologists. The large amount of sources also reflects a desire to uncover which sources are most appropriate to utilise for this type of study, and it has been found that the excavation reports themselves can reveal the most information, if investigated within a designated framework.

About Johan Sandvang Larsen

Johan Sandvang Larsen has BA and MA degrees in Medieval and Renaissance Archaeology, AU, and has conducted his PhD-project at the Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet), which focused on the development of archaeological field methods in Danish towns. As part of the PhD, he taught field practice, statistics, and Viking Age topics for the Department for Archaeology and Heritage Studies, AU.

The PhD-project was fully funded by the Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet).

Time and place for the defence

November 12th 2021 at 13.00-16.00
Aarhus University, 4206-139

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THE GHOSTS OF ARCHAEOLOGIES PAST: INNOVATIONS, DEVELOP- MENTS, AND MOVEMENTS OF EXCAVATION PRACTI- CES IN DANISH TOWNS

PhD dissertation by Johan Sandvang Larsen



AARHUS UNIVERSITET

The Ghosts of Archaeologies Past: Innovations, developments, and movements of excavation practices in Danish towns

The PhD dissertation, *The Ghosts of Archaeologies Past: Innovations, developments, and movements of excavation practices in Danish towns*, by Johan Sandvang Larsen, Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet), Aarhus University, seeks to answer questions on how archaeological field methods develop over time, why these methods develop in their given trajectory, and what this means for archaeology as a whole. The archaeological practice in Danish towns has been selected as a case study for this purpose.

Learning methods

While one may be introduced to various methods through texts and seminars, it does not equate utilising them in the field. Rather, the methods that one actively chooses when possible throughout one's career, i.e. one's default way of approaching archaeological practice, seems to be the ones that were used at one's first proper excavation, when one first has responsibility, as having such ensures that one will ask the excavation leader for guidance, to ensure that one does it correctly, and thus take in their understanding.

Methodological developments

As a consequence of how one learns, methods tend to develop in non-linear manners, where the master-apprentice relationship creates a number of 'chains' of practice, where the apprentices continue the praxis of the master, although adapted to the given circumstance. When they themselves teach the next generation, they pass it on, creating the chain. Given the tendency of short contracts in Danish archaeology, this means that methods can spread between museums through individual archaeologists.

Choosing methods

While one has a default way of approaching archaeological practice, it is not always feasi-

ble, due to a variety of limiting factors, these including time, resources, and environmental conditions. Aside from these limiting factors, there are also a number of other considerations that have to be made, including why the excavation takes place, what the present museum strategy focuses on, and where archaeology as a whole is at the given time.

Changing foci

While archaeology has been practiced in Danish towns for a long time, the focus of the field has shifted among multiple axes; where the desired goal went from identifying the towns' layout, to determining their age, and, finally, to seeking the individuals that once lived there. Similarly, the approaches went from noting old structures discovered in earth works, to investigating them archaeologically when possible, to excavating whenever a new construction began. While requiring a change in interest, it is equally a result of changing legislation, which facilitated the required funds for conducting excavations.

Conclusion

Among the results of the dissertation are; a theoretical division of field methods into six 'challenges' that enables a detailed study of methods, an extensive overview of how field methods in Danish urban excavations have changed over time, an overview of multiple factors that have caused and limited the changes to archaeological practices, and a deeper understanding of how methods move in time and space.

Perspectives

The findings of the dissertation have the potential for impacting the field in different ways, including (i) how museums treat the newly educated archaeologists, as they hold the potential in spreading the given museum's way of working, (ii) how archaeologists consider the costs of archaeological practice, both economic and ecological, and (iii) enabling future research of archaeological development through the methodological framework that has been established in the dissertation.