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JOHN SIMONSEN. *Daily life at the turn of the Neolithic. A comparative study of longhouses with sunken floors at Resengard and nine other settlements in the Limfjord region, South Scandinavia*. 2017. Aarhus. Jutland Archaeological Society, Museum Salling and Aarhus University Press; 978-87-93423-14-5 475kr.



Simonsen's book is the pinnacle of almost 40 years of archaeological research scrutinising Final Stone Age and

earliest Bronze Age longhouses and settlements in the Limfjord region of Denmark c. 2600–1500 BC. This extraordinary achievement is entrenched in years of fieldwork campaigns led by Simonsen himself. The scientifically, and literally, heavy thesis was defended in September 2017, for the Danish higher doctoral degree in philosophy at Aarhus University. The habilitation comprises five lengthy chapters in addition to appendices and catalogues.

Chapter 1 sets the scene, with aims, methods and research history. It is remarkable how two-aisled longhouses occur throughout and beyond Scandinavia while the characteristic sunken-floor variety, with turf-built walls, is a Jutlandish invention that changed very little over several centuries. This tradition probably commenced during the Single Grave Culture 2800–2350 BC (Corded Ware) and flourished during the Beaker Period (the Late Neolithic) until 1600–1500 BC, when the rise of the Nordic Bronze Age introduced three-aisled longhouses standing tall and impressive in the landscape. Sunken-floor longhouses are known from 200 sites so far and predominantly from Jutland. Chapter 2 is the engine of the entire study, dealing with a core of 26 houses from Resengard, and 17 houses from the central Limfjord area, encompassing the Beaker period. The fulcrum is the fully excavated settlement at the low hill of Resengard, which, due to unusually well-preserved house constructions, has provided new knowledge about daily life and the maintenance and rhythms of

tradition. The life-cycle biography of major longhouse plots suggests a cycle of abandoning the old house and building a replica house elsewhere on the hill, with generational intervals of approximately 25 years. Simonsen convincingly argues that only one household (one major longhouse and 1–2 attached small-houses) existed at a time. This means that we can follow generational shifts, cycles and continuities on the same hill over three centuries. Based on abundant pottery in each longhouse, and coupled with radiocarbon dating, Chapter 3 makes a case for a three-phased chronology applicable to post-Beaker settlements from c. 1800–1500 BC (albeit with clear threads back into the Beaker Period). With the demonstrated life-biography of each longhouse, the pottery chronology supports the recurring movement of longhouses along the perimeter of the Resengard hill, approximately 12 times until around 1500 BC, when the hill was temporarily abandoned. Chapter 4 dives into the daily life of the households inhabiting longhouses spread across the archipelago of the central Limfjord region. The detailed spatial analysis of house finds and their contexts reveals well-ordered communities engaged in a wide array of indoor activities, which were allocated particular spaces on the floor, while the fertile hill accommodated crop agriculture and livestock. Chapter 5 is devoted to social interpretations of longhouse economies in terms of an exchange system linking the many single farmsteads spread across the archipelago. Due to differences among the region's longhouses in relation to the attached activities, it is argued that household production worked in a tiered manner. All households undertook basic activities such as agriculture, livestock herding and making simple flint tools. Many households produced woollen textiles, leatherwork, coarse pottery and small amounts of beer (based on moderate quantities of charred cereals), while only a small minority of households produced exquisite flint daggers, metal items, fine ware pottery, large quantities of beer (based on large amounts of charred cereals on floors) or collected and worked amber for trading. The system of single farmsteads must have necessitated strict rules for social interaction and biological reproduction. Drawing on the anthropological literature, Simonsen argues for a non-hierarchical, albeit highly competitive, social system.

A great strength of this book is the rich, nuanced documentation of the characteristic sunken-floor area occupying the eastern half of the two-aisled longhouses, revealing that these were dwelling spaces for humans

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and not meant for the stabling of livestock. Remnants of activities pertain *only* to the sunken-floor area, whereas the western ground-level floor may have contained storage for leaf fodder, hay and heather. The function of these sunken-floor spaces has been much discussed, but it is only with the latest contributions that living space has been identified as the most probable explanation (Sarauw 2006). Simonsen makes a case for turf-built walls as an integral part of a building tradition for sunken-floor houses, as well as numerous other observations not previously made. The best-preserved fossil floors show a subdivision of domestic space, which tallies with well-ordered daily routines in a small-scale peasant economy with long-term continuity; i.e. a robust tradition maintained by a number of in-house activities. Heating through scorched stones is preferred to open hearths, which are rare or non-existent. Handling of manifold cereals, amongst other things, relates to large-scale beer-brewing taking place in floor pits. Weeds, hazelnuts and heather sprigs formed part of the diet and economy.

The large amounts of pottery at Resengård form the scaffold of a pot-based chronology, which can now be applied more widely. Uniquely at Resengård, pot assemblages can be tied to individual longhouses, allowing for the recognition of a sequence of houses replacing each other in time. One might have wished for better integration of the ceramic chronology with the well-established sequence of flint dagger types, radiocarbon dates and the introduction of a copper-based metallurgy. The latter was apparently a late occurrence in this region, datable to just prior to the closure of the two-aisled longhouse tradition around 1500 BC (ignoring scant evidence for Bell Beaker-derived production of copper and gold items). By comparison, metallurgy was well established around 2000 BC in eastern Denmark and Scania, where the social structure appears to have been markedly different in a number of ways (Vandkilde 2017). In addition, multivariate statistics would have provided quantitative data on developments over time. Nonetheless, the typo-chronology moves this research well beyond the state of the art.

Short- or long-range movements of Bronze Age farmsteads within restricted areas are very often assumed, but Simonsen is the first to document and detail such a system of rotation. At Resengård, few longhouses could have existed at the same time. In all

probability it was, as Simonsen argues, one and the same household that reproduced itself over 12 generations on the hill in this densely inhabited landscape. The continuity of the Resengård farmstead—probably in some sort of a systematic alternation with fields and grazing areas—was a widespread model for dwelling in this landscape. This implies that abandoned houses decayed and became part of an integrated and coherent socio-economic system that included strategies for rubbish disposal, agriculture and livestock. This makes me wonder what kind of kinship system facilitated the maintenance of such a single farmstead, which must have been socially and biologically interlinked with others in the vicinity. The book does not seek to clarify reasons for the onset of the two-aisled sunken-floor tradition, nor how it may have responded to the overriding phases of metallurgical implementation, such as those around c. 2000 BC and again between 1600 and 1500 BC when the Nordic Bronze Age had its final breakthrough. Perhaps the interruption of centuries-long habitation on Resengård hill and elsewhere, and with the onset of an entirely new housing tradition—the three-aisled longhouse—should be considered in this light? One can always wish for more, and great results merit new research questions.

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