

Preface

Jens-Henrik Bech, Berit Valentin Eriksen & Kristian Kristiansen

The ‘Thy Project’ is the convenient shorthand term we have always employed for the Thy Archaeological Project, which is central to this book (for English speakers, Thy [tʰyː?] is pronounced with a hard ‘T’ – the ‘h’ is silent – rather like ‘Tu’, with stress on the T; our American friends never quite learned it). The Thy Archaeological Project began as a collaborative, interdisciplinary and international field project that ran from 1990 to 1997 (first synthesis published in 1998 by Earle *et al.*; further publications up to 2010 cf. Earle & Kristiansen 2010, appendices 2-3). In the early years, the excavation focus was mainly on Late Neolithic settlements in central Thy (published in 2008 by Martinez). But from 1993 onwards, it shifted to a number of Bronze Age settlements in central and northern Thy. The fieldwork was succeeded by a long post-excavation analysis phase – when new project members were added to fill gaps and address specific aspects – culminating, after 20 years, in this two-volume publication of the Bronze Age evidence. The project’s three strands of collaboration, together with its philosophy and development, will be briefly outlined here. They reflect the circumstances and conditions that face all modern archaeological field projects, and it is hoped that future projects may benefit from our experience in the Thy Project (see also Preface to Earle & Kristiansen 2010).

The first collaborative strand involved ten years of cooperation (1983-1995) between the National Agency for Nature Conservation and Forestry, Division for Archaeological Heritage (now The Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces, the former institution headed until 1994 by Kristian Kristiansen), and the Geological Survey of Denmark, Division for Geo-botanical Research (now The Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland, headed by Svend Thorkild Andersen† during the same period). This collaboration was aimed at producing regional pollen diagrams for areas of dense prehistoric settlement across Denmark. The Division for Archaeological Heritage (who financed the work), and the Division for Geo-botanical research

(who undertook the analyses), set up a long-term plan to cover the entire country, which resulted in a series of modern pollen diagrams produced by Svend Thorkild Andersen, Bent Aaby, Bent Odgaard and later also Peter Rasmussen. These pollen diagrams revealed the impact of prehistoric settlements on the vegetation in south Jutland, Djursland, northern Jutland, central Zealand and, finally, in Thy. Subsequently, local pollen data from Bronze Age barrows in Thy (published in Andersen 1999) and from megalithic monuments were added, too (published in Andersen 1992). However, the Thy pollen diagrams (one from Hassing Huse Mose and one from Ove Sø, the latter identical to the former and therefore only published in an internal report) were remarkable in showing a major and sudden ‘landnam’ around 2700 BC. This was linked to the Single Grave culture, which created an open landscape for grazing animals over a period of less than a century. A second clearance episode was evident in the Bronze Age, beginning around 1500 BC, which eliminated most of the remaining forests. They represent one of the most dramatic regional pollen sequences in northern Europe, but they make perfect sense archaeologically. Thy is renowned for its thousands of large Bronze Age barrows, which still crown the landscape and make it one of the most authentic barrow landscapes in Europe. The region has also produced some of the richest Bronze Age burials, especially from period III. The obvious next step was therefore to undertake an archaeological survey within the 10 km catchment area for the pollen diagram to gain an overview of the settlements. The results of this work were supplemented by local pollen data from excavated barrows (Andersen 1999), and later by pollen analyses of sediments associated with the buried Bronze Age fields excavated at Bjerre Enge, northern Thy, in order to gain an understanding of the local subsistence and landscape development (Andersen vol. I, chap. 9). This environmental strand was later developed further by several other scientists, both during and after the excavations.

The second collaborative strand involved the regional archaeological museum, Museum Thy, (formerly: Museet for Thy og Vester Hanherred) personified by Jens-Henrik Bech, who agreed to join the project, taking on responsibility for curation of finds and participating in the planning and implementation of the project, as well as the publication of its findings. Through the participation of Jens-Henrik Bech, and for long periods also his wife, Anne-Louise Haack Olsen, the museum thereby became engaged as a full project partner. This led on to the third strand of international collaboration. Jens-Henrik and Kristian Kristiansen soon realised that international partners were needed who could bring in students for field surveys and excavations. They invited Timothy Earle (UCLA, later Northwestern University, Chigaco), who fortunately for us had just been forced by local circumstances in Peru to terminate his field project there, to join the project team. He was therefore ready and prepared to bring his team of colleagues and students (e.g. John Steinberg and Peter Aperlo) to Thy, and to a completely different experience. However, he was the first to point out that we could not simply machine off the plough soil to gain access to the Bronze Age post holes, because the plough soil held what was left of Bronze Age cultural layers. Together with his graduate student John Steinberg, he designed a plough-soil research programme. Soon afterwards, we also invited Michael Rowlands from University College London to join us. He brought with him his graduate student Nick Thorpe, who would soon take over the field survey work with his team of students, when Michael had to leave for fieldwork in Africa. Between 1994 and 1997, the continuing survey work was led by Danish student Jørgen Westphal. Then, from 1994, when Kristian became Professor of Archaeology at the University of Gothenburg, student teams from Sweden were also brought to participate in the project.

It was inevitable that the project would benefit from involvement in the on-going rescue excavations of Bronze Age settlements undertaken by Museum Thy. The museum, in turn, would profit from the project's package of survey techniques, from plough-zone sampling to soil sieving and flotation. Collaboration with rescue archaeology led us first to the Aas ridge and Martin Mikkelsen, who soon after joined the project and was instrumental in excavating the Legaard site with Kristian Kristiansen and his team from 1996-1997. Then newly discovered Bronze Age sites with preservation of wood led us to Bjerre Enge in northern Thy, where rescue excavations on a former raised seabed had uncovered a rich Bronze Age cultural landscape that even included Bronze Age fields represented by ard marks. Anne-Louise Haack Olsen, from the museum, was part of the team as on-site director, together with Tim Earle at Bjerre 6 (1994-1995) and Bjerre 7 (1996-1997). As a result, we were finally able to cover the entire Bronze

Age sequence of settlements by combining these three areas – Sønderhå and the Legaard settlement, the Aas Ridge, on the Limfjord coast, and the Bjerre Enge settlement, close to the North Sea. We officially terminated the fieldwork part of the project in 1997.

Berit Valentin Eriksen (now Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology (ZBSA), Schleswig) and Inge Kjær Kristensen (now Museum Salling) joined the project at an early stage to analyse the large flint and pottery assemblages resulting from the excavations (Kristensen vol. II, chap. 18; Eriksen vol. II, chap. 21). During and after the Bjerre excavations a number of colleagues from a whole range of Danish and foreign institutions also contributed to the project with different kinds of supplementary analyses ranging from geological, archaeobotanical and archaeozoological subjects and much more. This involved Marianne Rasmussen from The Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces (vol. I, chap. 2), Jesper Olsen, Marie Kanstrup, Helle Juel Jensen, Kristian Dalsgaard & Mette Westergaard Nielsen from Aarhus University (vol. I, chap. 2; vol. II, chap. 23 and 26), Kristian Sjøgaard, Charlie Christensen, Morten Fischer Mortensen, Peter Steen Henriksen, David Earle Robinson, Jan Harild, Annine Moltsen, Kjeld Christensen, Aoife Daly, Orla Hylleberg Eriksen and Claus Malmros from The National Museum (vol. I, chap. 8, 10; vol. II, chap. 25), Georg Nyegaard from The National Museum of Greenland (vol. II, chap. 27), Kaj Strand Petersen† and Frants von Platen-Hallermund from The Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland (vol. I, chap. 7), Kaare Lund Rasmussen from The University of Southern Denmark (vol. II, chap. 19), Hans Peter Stika from The University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart (vol. II, chap. 31) and Svend Isaksson from Stockholm University (chap. II, chap. 20). Finally, the archaeologist and architect Bente Draiby made reconstructional drawings of some Bronze Age houses from Thy (e.g. contribution in vol. II, chap. 29).

The Thy Project has a remarkable history of constructing new archaeological machines. Inspired by a 'home-built' prototype at Museum Thy, John Steinberg, who carried out an extensive and laborious programme of plough-soil sampling for his PhD research (see Earle & Kristiansen 2010, appendix 2), constructed a highly efficient sieving machine that freed labour to speed up the sampling process (published in his award-winning *Antiquity* article in 1996). Similarly, to support another of Tim Earle's students, Kristina Kelertas, who undertook archaeobotanical analyses for her PhD research (see Earle & Kristiansen 2010, appendix 2), he called upon his colleague Christine Hastorf, who came to Thy and had a flotation machine constructed based on her latest best experience.

It is our basic philosophy that the social and academic lives of a project are intrinsically linked. When working in Thy, professors and students alike lived together and shared the sometimes primitive conditions encountered during the project. The small-talk around the dinner table, which often developed into interesting conversations, combined with regular weekly briefings and evaluations, which also included the airing of complaints, helped to keep the project team motivated. We established various traditions, such as a regular mini-conference, with presentations by members of the team and invited guests, and the annual eel dinner also became an institution (tragically eels are now nearing extinction). We also tested the Bronze Age cooking pits, with the most delicious results, when Jens-Henrik Bech, at his 50th birthday party, fed the team with meat cooked the Bronze Age way.

Once the fieldwork came to an end, the long, laborious process of post-excavation analyses began (articles were published along the way, especially pollen research and some archaeological syntheses, see below). Jens-Henrik Bech took over the leadership of this process, later aided by Berit Valentin Eriksen and Kristian Kristiansen, bringing in new members where required, organising regular meetings of the project team to present and discuss results, and applying for grants to allow participants to finalise their contributions. New results from on-going excavations were also added along the way.

The present publication is the result of these efforts to shed light on the Bronze Age in Thy from many different angles and involving as broad a spectrum of disciplines as possible and to place the archaeology of the area in both a regional and a broader supraregional, North Sea context. A total of 31 main and co-authors made this possible and contributed in the true spirit of the Thy Project to create this multi-author and multi-disciplinary work, which also includes two major 'hard core' artefact studies based on the challenging Bronze Age pottery from Bjerre and Legaard (Kristensen vol. II, chaps. 18 and 30) and the large flint assemblage from Bjerre (Eriksen vol. II, chap. 21).

On a final note, we wish to thank all those involved during the different stages of the project, from field research over post-excavation analyses to publication. Most notably the grant-supporting institutions, Museum Thy, the National Agency for Nature Conservation and Forestry, the Geological Survey of Denmark, the National Museum of Denmark, the National Science Foundation in the USA (DBS 9207082, DBS 9116921), the British Academy's Small Grants in Archaeology, the Swedish Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, who financed this publication, together with the Danish Farumgaard-Foundation, the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, the Danish Agency for Culture

and Palaces, Queen Margrethe II's Archaeological Foundation, the Beckett-Foundation, the Elisabeth Munksgaard Foundation and the Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology in Schleswig.

Acknowledgements

We wish to direct special thanks to the following for making important contributions to the production of this book: Anne Bloch Jørgensen and David Earle Robinson (linguistic revision and translation), Nils Wolpert (copy-editing), Mette Roesgaard Hansen (GIS illustrations), Rich Potter (digital illustrations), Beth Møller† and Jeppe Boel Jepsen (object drawings), Bente Philippsen (¹⁴C modelling and calibrations), Claudia Janke and Klaus Madsen (object photographs), Anne-Louise Haack Olsen (GIS illustrations and much more), Ea Rasmussen, Jens Nygaard and Lars Foged Thomsen (layout and graphic design).

References

- Andersen, S.T. 1992. Early and Middle Neolithic agriculture in Denmark: Pollen spectra from soils in burials mounds of the Funnel Beaker Culture. *Journal of European Archaeology* 1, pp. 153-181.
- Andersen, S.T. 1995. History of vegetation and agriculture at Hassing Huse Mose, Thy, northwest Denmark, since the Ice Age. *Journal of Danish Archaeology* 11 (1992/93), pp. 57-79.
- Andersen, S.T. 1999. Pollen Analyses from Early Bronze Age Barrows in Thy. *Journal of Danish Archaeology* 13 (1996/97), pp. 7-17.
- Earle, T., J.-H. Bech, K. Kristiansen, P. Aperlo, K. Kelertas & J. Steinberg 1998. The political economy of Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age society: The Thy Archaeological Project. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 31/1, pp. 1-28.
- Earle, T. & K. Kristiansen (eds.) 2010. *Organizing Bronze Age Societies, The Mediterranean, Central Europe, and Scandinavia Compared*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martinéz, M.P.P. 2008 Bell Beaker communities in Thy: The first Bronze Age society in Denmark. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 41 (2), pp. 71-100.
- Steinberg, J. 1996 Ploughzone sampling in Denmark: isolating and interpreting site signatures from disturbed contexts. *Antiquity* vol. 70, pp. 368-392.



Burial mounds at Dollerup to the east of the Bronze Age site Klostergård in central Thy (cf. Olsen vol. II, chap. 32). Photo: J.-H. Bech.